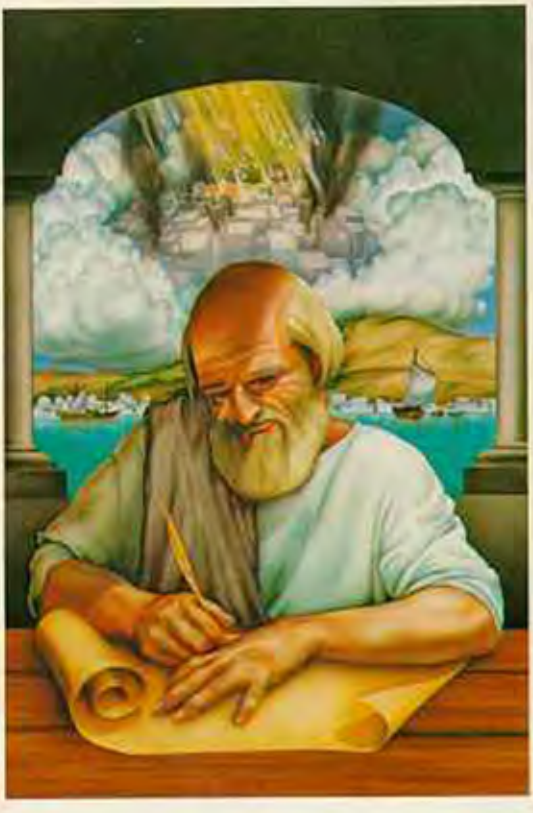
Before Jerusalem Fell

Dating the Book of Revelation



KENNETH L. GENTRY, JR.

BEFORE JERUSALEM FELL

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The Beast of Revelation, 1989

BEFORE JERUSALEM FELL

Dating the Book of Revelation

An Exegetical and Historical Argument for a Pre-A.D. 70 Composition

Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D.

Institute for Christian Economics
Tyler, Texas

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Dedicated to

Dr. Greg L. **Bahnsen**

who first startled me with his commitment
to and then convinced me of
the early date of Revelation

Testimonials Regarding *The Dating of Revelation*

"*Here is a book some of us have been awaiting for years! Now that it is here we can rejoice. Mr. Gentry convincingly demonstrates the fact the book of Revelation was written, as it in so many ways declares, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It should receive a wide reading and ought to rattle many windows.*"

–Jay E. Adams, Ph. D.,
Author of The *Time Is at Hand* and Professor,
Westminster Theological Seminary West,
Escondido, California.

"*A thorough and outstanding statement of the case for the early date of Revelation. The book makes one aware of the evidence from within the book and from early church sources, and surveys the arguments of New Testament scholars of this century and previous centuries concerning the question. No stone is left unturned to resolve the question.*"

– George W. Knight III, Th.D.,
Professor of New Testament,
Covenant Theological Seminary,
St. Louis, Missouri.

"*The Rev. Kenneth Gentry has presented a powerful and convincing case for a pre-A.D. 70 writing of the book of Revelation. He has demonstrated this from both the internal and external witnesses. Hopefully this dissertation will be published and widely read within Christian circles.*"

– W. Gary Crampton, Th.D., Ph. D.,
Professor of Theology,
Whitefield Theological Seminary,
Lakeland, Florida.

"*It would be an unhappy mistake to assume this work is a tedious, technical treatment of the date of Revelation. The dating question affects the interpretation of many passages. Gentry's thorough treatment is thus not only valuable, but it leads the reader through substantive passages of Revelation with illuminating insights.*"

– Carl W. Bogue, Th.D.,
Visiting Professor of Theology,
Whitefield Theological Seminary,
Lakeland, Florida.

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

by Gary *North*

I have several reasons for wanting to see this book in print. The first reason is my technical interest in the methods of dating primary source documents on the basis of their internal evidence and external evidence from other sources. The accurate dating of historical documents is crucial to our knowledge of the events of any period of history. If we do not date our primary source documents accurately, we cannot expect to gain an accurate understanding of history. There have been too many ill-fated attempts to compare "contemporary" events in different ancient societies based on inaccurate chronologies. The pieces of the chronological jigsaw puzzle do not match, and therefore must be damaged by the historian in order to jam them together. My theory of chronology is simple: "If we don't know when something happened, we don't know how or why it happened."

The Bible is self-consciously an historical book. More than any other foundational religious text in the man's history, it claims to be an historical book. Thus, Christians need to treat it as the historical document it claims to be. Modern scholarship, even Christian scholarship, has too often refused to do this, especially with regard to the Old Testament. For example, scholars prefer to accept as chronological standards the various attempted modern reconstructions of the historical texts of the non-historically minded Egyptians. They then rewrite the events of Scripture, especially the events of the Exodus, in terms of modern interpretations of pagan Egyptian texts. [1]

My second reason for publishing this book is that as a Bible student, I want to know when a biblical book or epistle was written, so that I can better understand the ethical message of the document.

1, Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh: Dominion Religion vs. Power Religion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), Appendix A: "The Reconstruction of Biblical Chronology."

If we do not understand the historical context ("withtext"), we will have trouble understanding the text itself. If we fail to understand both text and context, we risk misapplying the text's message in our lives. In the case of no other book of the New Testament has an error in dating led to more misinterpretations and misapplications than the Book of Revelation.

Third, there is no doubt that the intellectual attack on the integrity of the Bible's manuscripts has been the most important single strategy of covenant-breaking modern Bible scholars.[2] I refer here to the academic specialty known as higher criticism of the Bible.[3] A large part of this attack involves the dating of the Bible's original texts. The presupposition of all higher critics of the Bible is that the biblical texts, especially the prophetic texts, could not possibly have been written at the time that the texts insist that they were written. To admit that they were written when the texts say that they were written would be to admit that mortals, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, can accurately predict the future. This would destroy the most cherished assumption of the humanist: the sovereignty of man. If this ability to forecast the future actually exists, the future is not only known to the revealer, it is foreordained by something beyond man's power to alter. This points clearly to the absolute sovereignty of God, and the humanist rejects this doctrine with all his heart.[4]

Prophecy Fulfilled

In 1987, my publishing company, Dominion Press, published David Chilton's book, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book*

2. Writes Old Testament theologian Walter Kaiser: "For many it is too much to assume that there is consistency within one book or even a series of books alleged to have been written by the same author, for many contend that various forms of literary criticism have suggested composite documents often traditionally posing under one single author. This argument, more than any other argument in the last two hundred years, has been responsible for cutting the main nerve of the case for the unity and authority of the biblical message." Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Academie, 1983), p. 26.

3. See Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (2nd cd.; Phillipsburg, New Jersey: presbyterian & Reformed, [1949]); Allis, *The Old Testament: Its Claims and Its Critics* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1972).

4. Very few Arminians ("free-will Christians") discuss the topic of biblical prophecy in terms of God's absolute sovereignty. They may enjoy discussing Bible prophecy; they do not enjoy discussing the predestinarian implications of Bible prophecy.

of Revelation. In writing this book, Chilton adopted Ray Sutton's summary of the Bible's five-point covenant model.[5] *Days of Vengeance* shows that John's Apocalypse is structured in terms of this same five-point model.[6] Chilton's book was the first comprehensive verification of Sutton's thesis based on a New Testament book.[7] *Days of Vengeance* discusses the Book of Revelation in terms of these themes:

As God's covenant lawsuit against Israel
As a worship liturgy of the church
As a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem
As a rejection of political religion (Rome)
As a prediction of Christian dominion in history

The individual theses of his book were not in themselves revolutionary, but taken as a unit, they were. The book presents a new way of reading this difficult New Testament text.

Preterism Revived

If Chilton's commentary is correct, the overwhelming majority of the eschatological events prophesied in the Book of Revelation have already been fulfilled. This interpretation of New Testament prophecy has long been known as *preterism*, meaning "from the past tense," i.e., the preterit tense: over and done with. It should therefore not be surprising to discover that defenders of both premillennialism and amillennialism are exceedingly unhappy with Chilton's book. The premillennialist are unhappy with the book because it shows that the apocalyptic New Testament language of God's visible judg-

5. Ray R. Sutton, *That You May Prosper: Dominion By Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

6. The implications of Sutton's discovery are shattering for dispensationalism. If the Old Testament covenants were all structured in terms of a single five-point model, and if this same model appears in many New Testament texts, even to the extent of structuring whole books or- epistles, then the case for a radical discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament collapses. As a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, Sutton fully understands the threat of his thesis for dispensationalism. So do dispensational authors H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, which is why they refused to discuss Sutton's thesis in their attack on Christian Reconstructionism. They buried their brief summary of the five-point model in their annotated bibliography (seldom read), and then failed to refer to this in the book's index. See House and Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1988), pp. 438-39.

7. It was actually published a few months before Sutton's book, but Sutton had discussed his thesis in detail with Chilton while Chilton was writing his book.

ments was fulfilled in A.D. 70. There are therefore no major eschatological discontinuities ahead of us except the conversion of the Jews (Rem. 11) and the final judgment (Rev. 20). Therefore, neither the church nor living Christians will be delivered from this world until the final judgment. The so-called Rapture will come only at the end of history. There is no "great escape" ahead. This interpretation of Bible prophecy especially appalls dispensational premillennialists. They want their great escape.[8]

The amillennialists are unhappy with the book for a different reason. They affirm preterism's view of the future's continuity — on this point, they stand with the preterists against premillennialism – but they reject the postmillennial optimism of Chilton's book. If preterism is true, then most of the prophesied negative sanctions in history are over. Covenant theology teaches that there are positive and negative sanctions in history. If the prophesied (i.e., inevitable) negative sanctions are behind us, then the church has no legitimate eschatological reason not to expect God's positive sanctions in history in response to the preaching of the gospel. There is no legitimate eschatological reason not to affirm the possibility of the progressive sanctification of individual Christians and the institutions that they influence or legally control. But amillennialism has always preached a continuity of external defeat for the church and for the gospel generally. The victories of Christianity are said to be limited to the hearts of converts to Christianity, their families, and a progressively besieged institutional church. Amillennialism's continuity is the continuity of the prayer group in a concentration camp; worse: a sentence with no possibility of parole.[9]

---

8. Dave Hunt, Whatever *Happened to Heaven?* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1988).

9. I realize that certain defenders of amillennialism like to refer to themselves as "optimistic amillennialists." I had not heard this term before R. J. Rushdoony began to publish his postmillennial works. I think the postmillennialists' legitimate monopolization of the vision of earthly eschatological optimism has embarrassed their opponents. What must be understood from the beginning is that there has never been so much as an article outlining what this optimistic amillennial theology would look like, let alone a systematic theology. There has been no published Protestant amillennial theologian in four centuries who has presented anything but a pessimistic view of the future with respect to the inevitable cultural triumph of unbelief. It is my suspicion that any "optimistic amillennial" system would simply be a variety of postmillennialism. I believe that the term "optimistic amillennialist" refers to a postmillennialist who for employment constraints or time constraints – it takes time to rethink one's theology – prefers not to use the word "postmillennial" to describe his eschatology.

Postmillennialism's earthly eschatological optimism necessarily places great responsibility on Christians to apply the Bible to every area of life. It is my strongly held opinion that this has been the great resistance factor in the acceptance of the Christian Reconstructionist position. It is very difficult to "sell" responsibility, especially broad new responsibility. I sense that premillennialist and amillennialists are generally disturbed by the personal and ecclesiastical implications of this enormous moral and cultural burden. Postmillennialism's view of the future makes Christians morally responsible before God for discovering and applying a Bible-based judicial and ethical blueprint – a blueprint that should and eventually will govern the institutions of this world. [10] This means that the world is required by God to be run in terms of His revealed law. It also means that God will positively bless societies and institutions in terms of their faithfulness to His revealed law. [11] This is a crucial and long-neglected aspect of the biblical doctrine of sanctification — the progressive sanctification of institutions in history – which neither the premillennialists nor the amillennialists are willing to accept.

The Quick Fix of'%

One of the first accusations against *Days of Vengeance* – and surely the easiest one to make without actually having to read the book – was that the Book of Revelation could not possibly have been what Chilton says it was, namely, a prediction of the fall of Jerusalem. Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70; the Book of Revelation, we are assured, was written in A.D. 96. Thus, the critics charge, the cornerstone of Chilton's thesis is defective.

This criticism would be unquestionably correct if, and only if, the Book of Revelation was written after A.D. 70. If the book was written prior to A.D. 70, Chilton's thesis is not automatically secured, but if Revelation was written after A.D. 70, then Chilton's thesis would have to be drastically modified. Critics noted that Chilton's text does not devote a great deal of space defending a pre-A.D. 70 date. His book therefore appears vulnerable.

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10. In 1986 and 1987, Dominion Press published a ten-volume set, the Biblical Blueprints Series. It was not well-received by the academic Christian world or the evangelical-fundamentalist community.

11. Gary North, *Dominion and Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

Baiting the Hook

This vulnerability was admitted in print by Rev. Gentry in an early review of Chilton's book. Like a skilled fisherman baiting his hook with a bright, shining fly, Rev. Gentry wrote: "Chilton only gives four superficially argued pages in defense of what is perhaps the most crucial matter for consistent preterism: the pre-A.D. 70 date for the composition of Revelation." [12] The temptation to take the bait was just too great for a pair of dispensationalists: H. Wayne House of Dallas Theological Seminary and Thomas D. Ice, a pastor. They devoted a dozen pages of their anti-Reconstructionist book to the question of the date of Revelation.[13] They insisted that the Book of Revelation had to have been written after A.D. 70. Little did they know that Rev. Gentry had already completed the bulk of his doctoral dissertation on the dating of Revelation. Like fish grabbing a baited hook, the two authors bit hard. This hook is now embedded in their collective jaw. With *Before Jerusalem Fell*, Dr. Gentry now reels them in.

Lest I be perceived as indicating that only premillennial dispensationalists have lost a favorite and easy-to-invoke excuse for not taking Chilton's preterist thesis seriously, let me also say that historic premillennialists and amillennialists are equally inclined to dismiss preterism with the same cavalier attitude. The A.D. 96 tradition has always been convenient for this purpose. One wonders if eschatological concerns may have been the original reason for the invention of the A.D. 96 hypothesis. It has heretofore been an inexpensive way to justify a refusal to read any detailed and carefully argued alternative interpretation of this difficult New Testament book.

Conclusion

I regard this monograph as one more nail in the coffin of all non-preterist views of the Book of Revelation, or at least a nail-remover in what non-preterists had long believed was the final nail in preterism's coffin. The news of pretensm's death, like Alva J. McClain's announcement of postmillennialism's death, was premature.[14] This book, along with Gentry's shorter book,

12. Counsel *of Chalcedon* (June 1987), p. 10.
13. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, pp. 249-60.
14. Alva J. McClain, "Premillennialism as a Philosophy of History," in W. Culbertson

The Beast of Revelation,[15] reveals that preterism is alive and well. It is now the responsibility of non-preterist theologians to answer Dr. Gentry, not the other way around. If they fail to respond with the same precision and wealth of detail provided in *Before Jerusalem Fell*, then the preterist position will eventually become dominant. The old rule is true: "You can't beat something with nothing." The critics had better not rest content in confining their remarks to three-page reviews in their in-house (and seldom read) scholarly journals.

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and H. B. Centz (eds.), *Understanding the Times* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1956), p. 22.

15. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989.

PREFACE

The present volume represents more than two years' labor while engaged in studies in the doctoral program of Whitefield Theological Seminary of Lakeland, Florida. The topic was undertaken under the able counsel and with the much needed and very gracious encouragement of the writer's dissertational advisors at Whitefield Seminary – Rev. W. Gary Crampton, Th.D., Ph. D.; Rev. Daniel C. Coleman, Ph. D.; and Rev. Carl W. Bogue, Jr., Th.D. – and of the seminary's president, Rev. Kenneth G. Talbot, Ph.D.

In addition to their project-long assistance, the manuscript was also critically read by three scholars outside of the Whitefield faculty: one an early date advocate, Rev. Jay E. Adams, Ph. D., of Westminster Theological Seminary West, and the others late date advocates, Rev. C. Gregg Singer, Ph. D., of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and Rev. George W. Knight III, Th.D., of Covenant Theological Seminary. Their willingness to share their scholarly expertise despite their own time pressures is deeply appreciated.

Still further I must mention Gary North, Ph.D., of the Institute for Christian Economics, who, as an avid early date advocate, was willing to publish this manuscript in its present form. His additional insights and suggestions have also been received with much benefit.

In addition I would like to mention four others who assisted me in the preparation of the manuscript. Mr. Vance A. Burns of Houston, Texas, graciously employed his considerable technical computer competence in printing the original dissertation for final presentation, despite his unexpected medical difficulties. My daughter, Amanda Gentry, spent many hours helping me double check quotations for accuracy — hours she could have more enjoyably spent playing tennis. Mr. Bob Nance generously assisted me in the final word-processing preparation of the manuscript for presentation to the publisher, as well as preparing some of the indices (despite his preparations for his upcoming wedding to Lise Garrison). Mr. James

B. Jordan, long-time friend, is also to be thanked for his careful editing of the final manuscript for publication.

Each of these is to be thanked with deep appreciation for the sharing of their valuable time and for encouraging me in this project. Without their encouragement the undertaking would have been immensely more difficult and the potential value of my labor much diminished. Of course, the end product is the present writer's – he alone is responsible for any deficiencies and inadequacies that may be discovered within.

Although the goal of the dissertational inquiry was quite narrow — to ascertain the general time-frame of the composition of one book in the New Testament – the scope of the research demanded for a careful demonstration of the goal proved to be quite broad. This was so for two reasons.

In the first place, the majority of current scholarship accepts a late date for Revelation – a date of around A.D. 95 – which this work seeks to refute. Consequently, there was a vast array of more readily available scholarly material for the opposite position. Thus, the establishment of our case was confronted with a sizeable range of material for the contrary conclusion, which demanded sorting and scrutinizing.

In addition, by the very nature of the case the determination of the date of Revelation's composition is quite a complex affair. It requires engaging in an exegesis of critical passages, a diligent survey of the voluminous scholarly literature on Revelation, an inquiry into the apocalyptic literature of the era, and a laborious search through the writings of both the early church fathers and the pagan Roman historians. It is hoped that the profusion of research contained within will not be without beneficial effect.

Nevertheless, despite the extensive and involved nature of the research presentation, it is the conviction of the present writer that the case for Revelation's early dating is clear and compelling. The extensive research gathered in the establishment of this date was not sought for in a strained effort to create a case where there was none. On the contrary, much of the material was employed with the intention of demonstrating the precariousness of the contrary opinion. Of course, whether or not the rebuttal to the majority opinion and the positive establishment of the minority position are adequate to the task is now left to biblical scholarship to assess.

A case for the early dating of Revelation is herewith humbly presented to the world of biblical scholarship. May God be pleased with our efforts to discern the truths of His holy and infallible Word.

Rev. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Th.D.
Reedy River Presbyterian Church
Greenville, South Carolina
November 22, 1988

PART I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

1

REVELATION STUDIES

Interest in Revelation

At once arresting and bewildering the reader, the vivid imagery and dramatic message of Revelation have long captivated the attention of Christendom. Although the literary genre of which it is considered to be a distinctive representative (i .e., "apocalyptic") [1] was familiar to the ancients of the first century of our era, Revelation is, nevertheless, set apart from its literary milieu at two levels. On the human level, it is widely heralded as "the most perfect of apocalypses," and "the climax in style of an age of literary effort ."2 On the divine level, it is nothing less than inspired revelation from God.

---

1. The debate as to whether or not Revelation ought to be classed as apocalyptic literature will not be engaged here. Probably it is *not* properly "apocalyptic," in the narrow sense in which this word is understood by modern scholars. Rather, we prefer "prophetic." For an excellent discussion of the significant differences, see David Hill, New *Testament Prophecy* (Atlanta John Knox, 1979), chap. 3: "The Book of Revelation as Christian Prophecy." See further discussion in G. Von Rad, *Theology of&h Old Testament, vol. 2* (Eng. trans.: Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965); P. Vilhouer, "Apocalyptic," in R. M. Wilson, cd., *New Testament Apocrypha, vol. 2* (Eng. trans.: London: Lutterworth, 1965); and Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament, 17th* cd., trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1973), pp. 457ff. Additional discussion and documentation can be found in Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis. Critique of the Irenaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historical Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):134, n. 4.

2. Vacher Burch, *Anthropology and the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1939), p. 11. James Moffatt speaks of it thus: Revelation "rises above its class *quantum lenta solent inter uiburna cupresst.* [W] hen it is approached through the tangled underwoods of apocalyptic writings in general, with their frigid speculations upon cosmic details, their wearisome and fantastic calculations, their tasteless and repulsive elements, and the turgid rhetoric which frequently submerges their really fine conceptions, the Apocalypse of John reveals itself as a superior plant" (James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament,* vol. 5 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980], pp. 295-296).

Thus, both in terms of its literary genius and its divine inspiration and message, Revelation merits its fascinating captivation of the mind.

Ancient! Interest

Consequently, it is not surprising that "neglect did not characterize the earliest history of the book."3 Indeed, its transmission history clearly attests its wide circulation in early times.[4] New Testament historians, commentators, and textual critics alike have long noted that "this book is one of the best attested of early times."5

The intensity of ancient interest in Revelation is evidenced by the startling fact that "perhaps more than any other book in the New Testament, the Apocalypse enjoyed wide distribution and early recognition."[6] The prince of evangelical commentators on Revelation, Henry Barclay Swete, even observed in this regard: "The Apocalypse is well-worked ground. It would not be difficult to construct a commentary which should be simply a catena of patristic and medieval expositions."[7] Nevertheless, it should be noted that in its earliest history, despite both its impressive distribution and recognition "no book in the New Testament with so good a record was so long in gaining general acceptance."[8] Debate over Revelation in the post-Apostolic era raged not only over its interpretation (it does still today!), but over its very canonicity, as well. An excellent, brief survey of its early canon history can be found in Guthrie's classic *New Testament Introduction*,[9] the standard introduction among conservative Bible students. A more comprehensive treatment of the matter – also from a conservative perspective – is contained in Ned B. Stonehouse's *The Apocalypse in the Ancient Church*.[10]

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3. Donald B. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downer's Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 931.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 932.

5. Walter F. Adeney, *A Biblical Introduction, vol. 2: New Testament* (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 461.

6. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 36.

7. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. xii.

8. *Ibid.*, p. cxvii.

9. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 931-949.

10. Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Apocalypse in the Ancient Church (Goes,* Holland: Oosterbaan and Le Cointre, 1929), *passim.*

Modern Interest

More directly relevant to the current thesis, however, is the *modern* interest in Revelation studies. Interest in Revelation among Christians is basically of a two-fold nature. On the one hand, it is of significant spiritual importance to Christians in that it is one book among the sixty-six that compose the sacred, inspired canon of Protestant Christianity. As one portion of that inerrant and authoritative revelation from God, it demands – equally with the remaining books – the devout attention of the Christian so that the will of God might be more perfectly known. Conservative Christendom insists upon the plenary inspiration of Scripture; a logical (albeit often overlooked) corollary to plenary inspiration is the "plenary significance" of Scripture. That is, since all of the books of Scripture are inspired of God, all are profitable (2 Tim. 3:16-17).11

On the other hand, it is of significant moral and psychological importance to Christians in that God has created man to be naturally inquisitive (Prov. 25:2). And especially is man inquisitive about the future since, even though he is endowed with an immortal soul, he is a creature enmeshed in time (Eccl. 3:1-11). Furthermore, the future is an intrinsically moral concern because expectations regarding the future impact on the priorities and values one holds in the present.[12] In that the current *popular* understanding of Revelation is predominantly dispensationalist in orientation, Revelation attains a heightened significance among Christians in regard to its importance for eschatological study.

---

11. In this regard M. R. Newbolt in *The Book* of Unveiling (London: SPCK, 1952) has observed: "The Revelation of St. John the Divine is an immensely important part of Holy Scripture. It lifts our grasp of the Faith on to a plane which no other book can reach, setting our life against the background of 'the things that are not seen which are eternal'. . St. John opens a door into heaven, he also lifts the cover of 'the bottomless pit'; he reveals both celestial splendors and infernal horrors," From another perspective, John F. Walvoord, though a dispensationalist, notes the importance of Revelation in his *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966, p. 7): "In some sense, the book is the conclusion to all previous biblical revelation and logically reflects the interpretation of the rest of the Bible."

12. A few samples from the prevailing dispensationalist viewpoint will serve to illustrate the potential *negative* impact of this particular eschatology on cultural and social involvement. Charles C. Ryrie has written: "This world is not going to get any easier to live in. Almost unbelievably hard times lie ahead. Indeed, Jesus said that these coming days will be uniquely terrible. Nothing in all the previous history of the world ean compare with what lies in store for mankind" (The *Living End* [Old Tappan, NJ: Revel], 1976], p. 21). If such is the case, why get involved?

Regarding the present generation, church historian Timothy P. Webber has noted that the "resurgence of the interest in prophetic themes is one of the most significant developments in American religion since the Second World War. "[13] This fact is evidenced generally in the rising flood of eschatological literature pouring forth from Christian publishers. It is evidenced specifically in that one of the most widely distributed books of the present era is Hal Lindsey's multi-million selling *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Lindsey's work has been translated into no fewer than 31 languages and circulated in more than 50 nations.[14] While emphasizing Lindsey's role in the matter, *Newsweek* magazine reported a few years back that in American religious circles there is a "Boom in Doom. "[15] Many Christians believe that our present era is witnessing "The Great Cosmic Countdown,"[16] *Countdown to Armageddon,*[17] or *Countdown to Rapture.'8* That is, they believe this era is the last era of earth's history as we know it, and is soon to come to a climactic close.

This frenzied interest in biblical prophecy, along with its concomitant concern with the book of Revelation, has given no indication whatsoever of calming. Indeed, the calendar suggests that interest in prophecy is more likely to increase than to diminish – at least for the

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Hal Lindsey writes: "What a way to live! With optimism, with anticipation, with excitement. We should be living like persons who don't expect to be around much longer" (The *Late Great Planet Earth* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970], p. 145). He also writes later that "I don' t like cliches but I've heard it said, 'God didn't send me to clean the fish bowl, he sent me to fish.' In a way there's a truth to that" ("The Great Cosmic Countdown," *Eternity*, Jan. 1977, p. 21).

Norman Geisler argues vehemently that "The premillennial [that is, dispensational – KLG] position sees *no* obligation to make distinctly Christian laws" ("A Premillennial View of Law and Government," *Moody Monthly*, Oct. 1985, p. 129).

Because of such statements, we sadly must agree with Pannenbergian theologian Ted Peters when he says of dispensationalism, "it functions to justify social irresponsibility," and many "find this doctrine a comfort in their lethargy" *(Futures: Human* and *Divine* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1978], pp. 28, 29).

13. Timothy P. Webber, *The Future Explored* (Wheaton: Victory, 1978), p. 9. Ted Peters observes: "Our Western civilization has long been imbued with a general orientation toward the future; and the present period is witnessing an especially acute epidemic of future consciousness" (Peters, *Futures,* p. 11).

14. Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon (New* York: Bantam, 1980), p. 4

15. Kenneth L. Woodward, "The Boom in Doom," Newsweek, 10 Jan. 1977, p. 49.

16. Stephen Board, "The Great Cosmic Countdown," *Eternity*, Jan. 1977, pp. 19ff.

17. Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon.*

18. Salem Kirban, *Countdown to Rapture (Irvine,* CA: Harvest House, 1977).

short term. Both liberal and conservative theologians, as well as the secular and scientific communities, have allowed their imaginations, hopes, and fears to be captivated by the looming of that magic year, the year 2000. Even dispensationalist historian Dwight Wilson has lamented: "As the year 2000 approaches there will undoubtedly be increased interest in premillenarian ideas and even more hazardous speculation that this third millennium will be the Thousand Year Kingdom of Christ."[19] In his philosophico-theological treatise on futurology, Ted Peters dedicated his entire first chapter – "Toward the Year 2000" – to a survey and analysis of the interest the year 2000 is already generating. Regarding the interest in the year 2000, he notes with some perplexity: "It is a curious thing that as we approach the year 2000 both the secular and scientific communities are taking a millennialist perspective. . . . All this has given rise to a new academic profession: namely, futurology. "2° Examples could be multiplied to the point of exhaustion.

Eschatological inquiry should be a genuinely Christian concern in that it is fraught with tremendous moral and cultural, as well as spiritual, implications. Regrettably, prophetic studies have been so dominated by a naive sensationalism that they have become a source of embarrassment and grief to many in conservative Christendom. No book has more trenchantly pointed out the ill-conceived sensationalism of the modern prophecy movement than Dwight Wilson's carefully researched and profusely documented *Armageddon Now!*[21]

The only comfort to be derived from this lamentable situation is that this generation is not the only one to suffer through such. This seems to be what Justin A. Smith had in mind when late in the last century he observed: "Perhaps there is no book of the Bible the literature on which is in a certain way so little helpful to an expositor as that of the Apocalypse."** Or as church historian Philip Schaff

19. Dwight Wilson, *Armageddon Now!* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), p. 13.

20. Petera, *Futures*, p. 9. In regard to futurology studies, see for instance: Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (Toronto: Bantam, 1970); Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb (New* York: Ballantine, 1968); John McHale, *The Future of the Future (New* York George Braziller, 1969); Robert Theobald, *Beyond Despair* (Washington: New Republic, 1976); Victor Ferkiss, *The Future of Technological Civilization (New* York: George Braziller, 1974); Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America (New* York: Bantam, 1970).

21. Wilson, *Armageddon Now, passim.*

22. Justin A. Smith, *Commentary on the Revelation, in* Alvah Hovey, cd., *An American Commentary* on *the New Testament* (Valley Forge Judson, [1884] rep. n.d.), p. 4.

noted a quarter century later: "The literature of the Apocalypse, especially in English, is immense, but mostly impository rather than expository, and hence worthless or even mischievous, because confounding and misleading."[23]

An illustration of the current severity of the problem is the success of Hal Lindsey's publications. These often tend to be as incautiously sensational as they are immensely popular. For instance, it is difficult to conceive of anyone reading Revelation with even a modicum of spiritual sensitivity who could be less than overawed at the terrifying majesty of the revelation of the righteous wrath of Almighty God as it is unleashed in all its holy fury upon His wicked enemies. Furthermore, it would seem that anyone reading Revelation with any appreciation of literature as such could not but stand in wonder at the intricately woven and multifaceted beauty of its structure and dramatic movement. Yet in Lindsey's works (which deal in large part with Revelation), Revelation's majestic splendor is reduced to simplistic jingles. Cute headings such as "The Future Fuhrer" (i.e., antichrist), "Scarlet O'Harlot" (i.e., the Harlot of Revelation 17), "the Main Event" (i.e., the glorious Second Advent of Christ), an so on, dot the pages.24 Despite the caution urged by the historitally illumined mind in regard to the failure of modern prognosticators,[25] Lindsey confidently asserts: "The information in the book you're about to read is more up-to-date than tomorrow's newspaper. I can say this with confidence because the facts and predictions in the next few pages are all taken from the greatest sourcebook of current events in the world. "[26] In a follow up work he confidently sets forth his view that the 1980s may be the last generation of our era.[27]

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23. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:826.

24. Lindsey, Lute *Great Planet Earth,* pp. 98, 122, 169.

25. See Wilson's analysis in *Armageddon Now!* Note J. A. Alexander's warning in the 1800s in his article "The End is Not Yet" (reprinted in *The Banner of Troth 88* [January, 197 1]: 1ff.). A perfect illustration of unfounded confidence in this regard is A. W. Pink's *The Redeemer's Return* (Ashland, KY Calvary Baptist Church, [1918] rep.n.d.), pp. 318ff. Pink was certain that the beginning of World War I was the beginning of the end. Pink later changed his views and suppressed this book, which was reprinted only after his death.

26, Hal Lindsey, *There% A New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1973), p. 15.

27. Lindsey, *Countdown to Armageddon,* pp. 8, 12, 15.

Another example of the problem is ready to hand. Six million copies of a recent publication by Edgar C. Whisenant caused quite a stir among evangelical in the summer and fall of 1988.28 In that work, Mr. Whisenant laboriously "demonstrated" why Christ was to have returned to the earth in September, 1988. Regional news reports noted that a number of Christians so took his message to heart that they quit their jobs in anticipation of the event.

As indicated in the literature of our time, there is a widespread popular interest in Revelation today. Unfortunately, most of the interest in Revelation seems based on a radical misunderstanding of the very nature and purpose of the book. And much of this misapprehension is traceable to confusion regarding its original date of writing, as will be shown.

It would be a serious error, however, to conclude from the foregoing observations that interest in Revelation is simply a matter for those either concerned with understanding ancient history or intrigued with modern fads. Revelation has not only aroused the curiosity and engaged the minds of a vast multitude of people in history, but it has taxed the considerable talents of a host of history's literati, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Guthrie notes that there has been "no neglect" of Revelation among scholars.29 Earlier, Schulze observed that "the name of the number of volumes that have been written on and about the Book of Revelation is LEGION. And these volumes are almost as varied as the number of authors that have offered the fruits of their study of this book to the public."[30] Over 100 years ago even, Lange noted that the "literature on the Apocalypse . . . is of immense extent."[31] Swete observed that the "literature of the Apocalypse is immense," and that "since the invention of printing the output of books upon the Apocalypse has steadily increased, and a bare enumeration of them would occupy more space than we can afford."[32] Schaff pointed out

28. Edgar C. Whisenant, 88 *Reasons Why the Rapture* Could *Be* in *1988: The Feast of Trumpets (Rash-Hash-Ana), September 11-12-13*(Nashville: World Bible Society, 1988).

29. Guthrie, *Introduction,p.931.*

30. Henry Schulz., "Preface," in William Hendriksen, More *Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1939] 1967).

31. John Peter Lange, Revelation, in vol. 24 of J. P. Lange, ed. *Commentary on the Holy Scripture: Critical, Doctrinal,* and *Homiletical*, trans. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. n.d.), p. 75.

32. Swete, *Revelation,* p. cxcvii.

in 1910 that Darling's list of English works on the Apocalypse contained nearly 54 columns.33 With Carpenter's observation regarding the literature of the Apocalypse, we are compelled to agree: It is "perfectly hopeless to touch so vast a subject as this."34

Certainly Revelation has captivated the minds of both the intense scholar and the part-time student alike. Although presumption and imagination have caused many a commentator to stumble in interpreting Revelation, nevertheless the book has commanded and will continue to command the devout attention of those who love God and His Word.

Interpretive Difficulty of Revelation

As noted, Revelation has historically generated an intensity of interest unparalleled among any of the books of Scripture. Yet, at the same time — as evidenced by the extreme diversity of the views on Revelation – it has been a most difficult book to interpret. Or perhaps the converse is true: *because* of the extreme difficulty of interpreting Revelation, it has created an intense interest! As Chilton has observed: "Many rush from their first profession of faith to the last book in the Bible, treating it as little more than a book of hallucinations, hastily disdaining a sober-minded attempt to allow the Bible to interpret itself – and finding, ultimately, only a reflection of their own prejudices. "35

Too often such a situation is due to the temptations presented by biblical scholars who gear their works for the popular market. This seems to be especially true of dispensational theologians. For instance, Charles Ryrie — an able scholar and probably the leading dispensationalist theologian of the present day – has written of Revelation: "How do we make sense out of all those beasts and thrones and horsemen and huge numbers like 200 million? Answer: Take it at face value."36 Later he gives an example of the usefulness of his "face value" hermeneutic in seeking the correct interpretation of Revelation 9:1-12 (the locusts from the abyss): "John's description sounds very much like some kind of war machine or UFO.. Demons

33. Schaff, *History* 1:826.

34. W. Boyd Carpenter, *The* Revelation *of St. John,* in vol. 8 of John Charles Ellicott, cd., *Ellicott's Commentary* on *the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. n.d.), p. 532.

35. David Chilton, *Paradise Restored* (Tyler, TX: Reconstruction Press, 1985), p. 153.

36. Ryrie, *The Living End,* p. 37.

have the ability to take different shapes, so it is quite possible that John is picturing a coming invasion of warlike UFOS. Until someone comes up with a satisfactory answer to the UFO question, this possibility should not be ruled out."[37] Such an interpretation makes one wonder whose face determines the value! Certainly not the first century Christians to whom it was written.

Scholarly Trepidation

The would-be interpreter of Revelation must approach the book with extreme caution and in humble recognition of the fact that he is studying a book that has perplexed the finest minds and confused the most godly saints throughout Christian history. The great Latin church father Jerome (A.D. 340-420) lamented long ago that it contained "as many words as mysteries."[38] Martin Luther (1483-1546), the famed reformer and untiring interpreter of Scripture, originally rejected Revelation as non-canonical, complaining, "My Spirit cannot adapt itself to the book."[39] Fellow reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) refused to take a doctrinal proof-text from Revelation.[40] Even John Calvin (1509-1564) omitted Revelation from his otherwise complete commentary on the New Testament. R. H. Charles (1855- 193 1), in his celebrated magnum opus on Revelation, states that it took him twenty-five years to complete his commentary.[41] Contemporary expositor Leon Morris has well noted that "the Revelation . . . is by common consent one of the most difficult of all the books of the Bible. It is full of strange symbolism. . . . The result is that for many modem men Revelation remains a closed book."[42]

In order to illustrate the need for caution and to hold rein upon the interpretive imagination – for so much written on Revelation is just that – it may serve well to list observations from a variety of Revelation's numerous interpreters on the book's formidability. After

37. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

38. Cited in Schaff, *History* 1:826.

39. Cited by Martin H. Franzmann, *The Revelation to John* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976), p. 7. Luther was ambivalent with regard to Revelation, as is evident in his gradual and reluctant acceptance of it. See Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957) 24:366 and 35:400.

40. *Ibid.*

41. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1:ix.

42. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 15.

all, as Reuss observed, "Ideas of the Apocalypse are so widely different that a summary notice of the exegetical literature, mingling all together, would be inexpedient. "[43]

Although he never wrote a commentary on Revelation,[44] that master theologian and exegete Benjamin B. Warfield proffered the following observation regarding the book: "The boldness of its symbolism makes it the most difficult book of the Bible: it has always been the most variously understood, the most arbitrarily interpreted, the most exegetically tortured."[45] Milton Terry in his 1911 classic, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (which is still widely employed in seminaries today), noted that "no portion of the Holy Scriptures has been the subject of so much controversy and of so many varying interpretations as the Apocalypse of John."[46] Eminent church historian Philip Schaff cautioned that "no book has been more misunderstood and abused; none calls for greater modesty and reserve in interpretation. "[47] Swete agreed:

> To comment on this great prophecy is a harder task than to comment on a Gospel, and he who undertakes it exposes himself to the charge of presumption. I have been led to venture upon what I know to be dangerous ground. . . .
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> . . . .
>
> The challenge [to unravel the Revelation] was accepted almost from the first, but with results which shew by their wide divergence the difficulties of the task. Schools of Apocalyptic interpretation have arisen, varying not only in detail, but in principle.[48]

Isbon T. Beckwith has suggested that Revelation probably stands without parallel in this regard throughout all range of literature: "No

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43. Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, *History of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1884), p. 155.

44. He did write several important theological treatises on various aspects of Revelation and Revelation studies, such as his entry under "Revelation" in Philip Schaff, cd., *A Religious Encyclopedia: Or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology (New* York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), vol. 3; his "The Apocalypse" (1886); "The Millennium and the Apocalypse" (1904); etc.

45. Warfield, "Revelation," in Schaff, *Encyclopedia* 3:2034.

46. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1911] 1974), p. 466.

47. Schaff, *History* 1:826.

48. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. xii, ccvii.

other book, whether in sacred or profane literature, has received in whole or in part so many different interpretations. Doubtless no other book has so perplexed biblical students throughout the Christian centuries down to our own time. "[49]

Some biblical scholars are severe in their analysis of the interpretive attempts on Revelation among commentators. Walter F. Adeney noted that "imagination runs riot with the elaborate fancies of this marvelous book. "[50] Anthropologist and commentator Vacher Burch in his thought-provoking *Anthropology and the Apocalypse* lamented: "The *Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* is the most difficult writing in the New Testament. No plainer proof of this is needed than the fact that most often it has been artificially sequestered so as to yield strange chronology and stranger sense, by the ignorant and the wise. The long history of its interpretation seems to demonstrate that the majority has desired it to be only a semi-magical writing."[51] With evident concern, Donald W. Richardson observed that "the 'lunatic fringe' of thinking on the times and seasons and last things of history has always revelled in the Revelation."[52] With a concern akin to that of Richardson, Greville Lewis complained that "through the centuries this book has been the happy hunting ground of the cranks who believed that its cryptic messages were meant to refer to the events of their own troubled age."[53] William Barclay follows suit in his statement that it has "become the playground of religious eccentries."[54]

On and on the calls to caution stretch: O. T. Allis, Ralph Earle, G. R. Beasley-Murray, A. Berkeley Mickelson,[55] and a host of other commentators and theologians agree to its perplexing difficulty. C.

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49. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies* m *Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1919] 1967), p. 1.

50. Adeney, *Biblical Introduction* 2:467.

51. Burch, *Anthropology*, p. vii.

52. Donald W. Richardson, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Richmond: John Knox, [1939] 1964), p. 12.

53. Greville P. Lewis, *An Approach to New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1954), pp. 244-245.

54. William Barclay, *The Revelation of John, 2* vols. Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 1:1.

55. "The Book of Revelation is a hard book to interpret . ." (O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the* Church [Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945], p. 210). Ralph Earle, "Preface" to Harvey J. S. Blaney, *Revelation,* in Earle, ed., *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary*, vol. *6*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 401. Of the interpreting of Revelation, A.

Milo Connick states the case well when he writes: "The book of Revelation has the dubious distinction of being the most misunderstood composition in the New Testament. Many readers don't know what to think of the writing, and others make altogether too much of it."[56]

Despite the very real difficulties associated with the book, however, it is "given by inspiration of God and is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16). Thus, surely it is the case that Swete overstated the matter when he wrote: "The key to the interpretation disappeared with the generation to which the book was addressed . . . , and apart from any clue to its immediate reference, it was little else but a maze of inexplicable mysteries. "5[7] Neither can we agree with Allen who despairingly lamented that "the book is, and must remain for the most part, unintelligible to the average reader."5[8]

Causes *of Difficulty*

There is a variety of reasons that either independently or collectively have caused the would-be interpreter to stumble. Foremost among them seem to be the following (which, due to our main purpose, will not be given extensive consideration):

First, unfamiliarity with its literary style. Revelation is considered by most scholars to be of the literary genre known as "apocalyptic."[59] This style is not unique to Revelation among canonical books – though it is not used elsewhere in canonical literature to the extent it is in Revelation.[Go] Apocalyptic imagery may be found in Daniel, Ezekiel,

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Berkeley Mickelson noted with mild understatement, "This is no small task" (*Interpreting the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963] p. 280). G. R. Beasley-Murray comments that "Revelation is probably the most disputed and difficult book in the New Testament" (G. R. Beasley-Murray, Herschell H. Hobbs, Frank Robbins, *Revelation: Three Viewpoints* [Nashville: Broadman, 1977], p. 5).

56. C. Milo Connick, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its History, Literature, and Thought* (Belmont, CA: Dickenson, 1972), p. 406.

57. Swete, *Revelation,* p. cxix.

58. Willoughby C. Allen and L. W. Grensted, *Introduction to the Books of the New Testament*, 3d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), p. 273.

59. The source of apocalyptic imagery, contrary to secularistic anthropologists, is not first century apocalypticism, but Old Testament era canonical prophetic imagery. The first century apocalyptic movement itself grew up in a literary milieu dominated by the Old Testament. Revelation is genealogically related to the Old Testament, not to non-canonical mythology. See note 1 above

60. "There is only one other Apocalypse which may be compared with [Daniel], and

and Isaiah most notably, but it is sprinkled throughout Scripture in numerous prophetic sections, including the teaching of Christ. "Of all the books of the New Testament this is the farthest removed from modern life and thought. . . . Apocalyptic has long ceased to be, as it once was, a popular branch of literature. "[61] This is especially troublesome for the "face value" school of interpreters.

Second, overlooking its original author and audience. In a quest for "relevance," commentators of the historicist and futurist schools seem to forget that John addressed Revelation to real, historical churches (Rev. 1:4, 11) about pressing and dire problems that he and they faced in the first century (Rev. 1:9 and chapters 2-3). In doing so a most fundamental rule of hermeneutics is breached. Two hermeneutics texts may be cited to illustrate the importance of this principie.

Berkhof's helpful study, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation,* teaches that hermeneutics "is properly accomplished only by the readers' transposing themselves into the time and spirit of the author."[62] Mickelsen's widely used *Interpreting the Bible* notes: "Simply stated, the task of interpreters of the bible is to find out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and thereupon to transmit that meaning to modern readers."[63] Needless to say, removing the setting of the book twenty or more centuries into the future is not conducive to a correct apprehension of its interpretation.

Third, misconstrual of its original intent. Revelation has two fundamental purposes relative to 'its original hearers. In the first place, it was designed to steel the first century Church against the gathering storm of persecution, which was reaching an unnerving crescendo of theretofore unknown proportions and intensity. A new and major feature of that persecution was the entrance of imperial Rome onto the scene. The first historical persecution of the Church by imperial Rome was by Nero Caesar from A.D. 64 to A.D. 68.[64]

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that is the New Testament book of Revelation" (Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949], p. 22).

61. Allen, *Introduction,* p. 273.

62. Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1950] 1974), p. 11.

63. Mickelsen, Interpreting *the Bible,* p. 5.

64. See later discussion in Chapter 17.

In the second place, it was to brace the Church for a major and fundamental re-orientation in the course of redemptive history, a re-orientation necessitating the destruction of Jerusalem (the center not only of Old Covenant Israel, but of Apostolic Christianity [cp. Acts 1 :8; 2: 1ff.; 15:2] and the Temple [cp. Matt. 24:1-34 with Rev. 11]).[65]

This matter of intent necessitates a corollary hermeneutical principle to that in point 2 above: "One of the basic principles of sound interpretation is that a later interpreter must find out what the author of an earlier writing was trying to convey to those who first read his words."[66] Both the recognition of the parties (author and recipients of the letter) and the purpose of a written document are essential to the proper grasp of the message. BeckWith has well-stated the matter: "For the understanding of the Revelation ofJohn it is essential to put one's self, as far as possible, into the world of its author and of those to whom it was first addressed. Its meaning must be sought for in the light thrown upon it by the condition and circumstances of its readers, by the author's inspired purpose, and those current beliefs and traditions that . . . influenced the fashion which his visions themselves took."[67]

A whole host of other factors adding to the difficulty of the interpretation of Revelation could be brought forward at this juncture. More relevant to the present purpose, however, is a final complicating factor that will be considered separately in the next chapter.

65. See later discussion in Chapters 11, 13, and 14.
66. Mickelsen, *Interpreting,* p. 23.
67. Beckwith, *Revelation,* p. v.

2

THE APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF DATING

The Importance of Dating

In several respects Revelation is reminiscent of the Old Testament book of Daniel: (1) Each is a prophetic work. (2) Each was written by a devout, God-fearing Jew in times of the author's personal exile and national Jewish distress. (3) Each shares a frequent and very obvious stylistic similarity. (4) Revelation frequently draws from Daniel. [1] Indeed, Revelation is even recognized as a New Testament Daniel by some scholars. Mounce observes that "it is the NT counterpart to the OT apocalyptic book of Daniel."2

Beyond these significant similarities there are two other related issues that directly bear upon our major concern. One is that both have widely disputed dates argued by biblical scholars, dates that fall into two *general* classes: "late" and "early." Whereas liberal scholars invariably argue for a late date for Daniel (i.e., during the Maccabean era), almost as invariably do conservatives argue for its early date (i.e., during the Babylonian exile).3 The division between

1. Swete has observed that "there are certain books which [the author] uses with especial frequency; more than half his references to the Old Testament belong to the Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and the Book of Daniel, and in proportion to its length the Book of Daniel yields by far the greatest number" (Henry B. Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977], p.cliii).

2. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of* Revelation. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 23. Cf. also John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: A Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 122.

3. As per most conservative scholars, for example: C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Book of Daniel.* Keil and Delitzsch Old Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1975), p. 43ff.; Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory* Guide *to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 195 1), pp. 394ff.; E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 23ff.; Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), pp. 360ff.; and R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 1110II

the two general dating camps regarding Revelation does not necessarily fall along conservative/liberal lines. Nevertheless, the division between Revelation scholars also tends to fall into two general camps. These, too, are usually classed as "late" (c. A.D. 95) and "early" (pre-A.D. 70, generally determined to be between A.D. 64 and A.D. 70) ?

New Testament scholars commonly divide the options on the dating of Revelation between these two periods.[5] We should note, however, that more precise dates than simply pre-A.D. 70 and c. A.D. 95 have been suggested by scholars – although the demonstration of a pre-A.D. 70 date is the major issue. For instance, Guthrie presents a three-fold classification based on the eras of three different Roman emperors: Domitian, Nero, and Vespasian.[6] Kepler suggests four different time-frame classifications: (1) late Nero, (2) between Nero and A.D. 70, (3) Vespasian, and (4) late Domitian.[7]

Second, the interpretation of both is strongly influenced by the date assigned by the interpreter. Although the time span separating the two general camps among Revelation interpreters (about 30 years) is not as broad as that which separates Danielic scholars (around 400 years), the catastrophic events separating the two Revelation dates are of enormous consequence. Those events include most prominently: (1) the beginnings of the Roman persecution of Christianity (A.D. 64-68); (2) the Jewish Revolt and the destruction of the

4. There are even some noted early date scholars that hold to dates during Claudius's reign in the mid-A.D. 40s (e.g., Züllig, Grotius, and Hammond), but this position is quite rare. See William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1893), pp. 75ff. Still others hold a mid-50s date. See Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 241 n for source documentation.

5. For example, Robert H. Gundry mentions only two options: in the general era of Nero and of Domitian; Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 364-365. See also G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation. New* Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974), p. 37; Harry E. Boer, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 19; J. W. Roberts, *The Revelation to John* (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1974), p. 9; Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 32-33; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 34.

6. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 949ff., 958ff., 961. It should be noted that the Neronic and Vespasianic time-frames under consideration are very close, usually understood to be separated by a period of from as early as A.D. 64 to around A.D. 70. Thus, they may both be considered in the "early" time-frame.

7. Thomas S. Kepler, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary for Laymen* (New York Oxford, 1957), p. 19.

Temple (A.D.67-70); and(3) the Roman Civil Warof A. D. 68-69. The compaction of the time-frame in question should not be deemed of little consequence. For instance, the events separating 1770 from 1800 in American history certainly brought about a remarkable change in American society, as did the events of 1940-1945 as to Japan's and Germany's histories.

A basic rule of hermeneutics is that a writing's date of origin must be ascertained as exactly as possible. This is as true for the revealed books in Scripture as it is for any other works of literature. As Berkhof noted in his standard hermeneutics manual: "The *word of God originated in a historical way, and therefore, can be understood only in the light of history.*"[8] From this general principle he goes on to assert strongly that: *"It is impossible to understand an author and to interpret his words correctly unless he is seen against the proper historical background."*[9] Terry, in his longstanding hermeneutics classic, spoke of this principle:

> It is of the first importance, in interpreting a written document, to ascertain who the author was, and to determine the time, the place, and the circumstances of his writing. . . . Herein we note the import of the term grammatico-*historical* interpretation. We are not only to grasp the grammatical import of words and sentences, but also to feel the force and bearing of the historical circumstances which may in any way have affected the writer. Hence, too, it will be seen how intimately connected may be the object or design of a writing and the occasion which prompted its composition. [10]

This rule is especially important in interpreting a book purporting to be prophetic. To choose a bold example by way of illustration, it is a matter of immense significance whether we accept the Latter-day Saints's assertion that *The Book of Mormon* was written only a few centuries after the birth of Christ or the non-Mormon consensus that it was written in the late 1820s. If it is acknowledged that the book was written in the 1800s then its "prophecies" regarding the "future" discovery of America are exposed as frauds.

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8. Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1950] 1974), p. 113.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

10. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), p. 231.

Regarding the biblical record, Berkhofhas rightly asserted: "For the correct understanding of a writing or discourse, it is of the utmost importance to know for whom it was first of all intended. This applies particularly to those books of the Bible that are of an occasional character, such as the prophetical books and the New Testament Epistles." [11] To his sampling could be added Revelation, as well. Allen and Grensted have noted in regard to Revelation particularly that "the question of the date of the publication of the Revelation is of great importance for the interpretation of the book. . . . Much of [John's] language, therefore, can only be understood through the medium of historical knowledge." [12] Guthrie, who sides with those in the late date camp, speaks of the matter of the date of Revelation somewhat less forcefully. Yet he, too, observes that the question is significant. He feels that the main purpose is unaffected by the dating question, but admits that the question of date may be necessary for "arriving at a satisfactory interpretation of the book. " 13

Terry uses Revelation as a particularly illustrative example of this grammatico-historical principle:

> The great importance of ascertaining the historical standpoint of an author is notably illustrated by the controversy over the date of the Apocalypse of John. If that prophetical book was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, a number of its particular allusions must most naturally be understood as referring to that city and its fall. If, however, it was written at the end of the reign of Domitian (about A.D. 96), as many have believed, another system of interpretation is necessary to explain the historical allusions.'4

Guthrie aside, it can be argued that the matter with which this study is concerned speaks to a question of the utmost significance in the right understanding of this important and intriguing book. Whether Revelation was written early or not has a tremendous bearing upon the direction interpreters may take in its exposition. If the destruction of the Temple looms in the near future for the author, it would seem that historically verifiable events within the prophecies could be

11. Berkhof, *Principles*, pp. 124-125.

12. Willoughby C. Allen and L. W. Grensted, *Introduction to the Books of the New Testament*, *3rd* ed. (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1929), p. 278.

13. Guthrie, *Introduction*, p. 949.

14. Terry, *Hermeneutics*, p, 237.

discerned with a heightened degree of confidence. A rather obvious stumbling block would be placed before the careless interpreter to deter extravagance. If the book was written two and one-half decades *after* the destruction of the Temple, however, then the prophecies are necessarily open to an extrapolation into the most distant future, and to the exclusion of the important events of A.D. 67-70. Hence, the whole bearing of Revelation on New Testament eschatology may well be altered by the determination of the matter before us.

Assumptions and Limitations

Before actually entering into the argument for the early date of Revelation, it will be necessary to mention briefly certain methodological matters regarding the present work's assumptions and limitations. Regardless of how thorough and exhaustive a researcher may attempt to be, no one investigating any subject can hope to deal with every single facet and implication of his topic. Only the mind of God exhaustively knows all things. Furthermore, neither is it necessary, particularly if there are available adequate treatments of the various related questions. And in order to be both honest for the critic's sake and helpful to the student, it is advisable that a researcher cite the assumptions and limitations of a particular project before actually engaging the topic. Some of the more fundamental assumptions and limitations in this work include the following.

Canonicity

First, the most important assumption governing the writer is that of the canonicity of Revelation. As indicated before, Revelation is one of the books of the Protestant canon that was much debated in early Church history. Nevertheless, its place in the canon is accepted today by all evangelical and conservative Christians. Its canonicity has been ably argued in the standard conservative commentaries and introductions.

Although an investigation of the dating of Revelation (or any book of the Bible, for that matter) does not demand this presupposition, nevertheless it is not without significance. The importance of this assumption lies in the fact that it demands the devout treatment of the topic at hand by the researcher. What is being dealt with is the Covenant Word of the Living God; no cavalier approach to the issue is tolerable. The research presented below is written with a strong

conviction as to the canonicity and significance of Revelation and is based, as best the writer is able to discern, on the most compelling of evidence.

Furthermore, in that Revelation is canonical Scripture it therefore possesses the attributes of Scripture, including absolute authority, truthfulness, and inerrancy. Revelation's authority is the authority of the voice of the Living God and the Exalted Christ. The truthfulness of the book, therefore, is impeccable. Consequently, Revelation does not err in any of its assertions, prophecies, or implications.

This assumption will be shown to matter a great deal when the actual argument for Revelation's dating is begun, for the argument will greatly stress Revelation's internal witness. As will be shown, the internal witness must be given the highest priority.

Authorship

Second, an assumption that is open to debate even among conservative scholars but will not receive attention in the present research is the Johannine authorship of Revelation. The position of the present writer is that Revelation was written by the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, the disciple of Christ. This John is also held to be the human author of the Gospel ofJohn and the three epistles ofJohn.

Now, of course, Revelation does not specifically designate the author as "the Apostle John. " The opening statements of Revelation mention only that "John" wrote it without specifying which particular John. Thus, to assert that the writer was not the Apostle would not be to deny our first assumption regarding its canonicity. Apostolic authorship may be an indicator of canonicity, but it is not a *sine qua non* of it. The New Testament includes several books not written by the original Twelve Apostles: Mark, *[5] Luke, the Pauline epistles, James, Jude, and Hebrews.

Nevertheless, the present writer is well aware of the various arguments against Johannine authorship. [16] The matter of authorship

15. Even if we accept the widespread and very credible view of tradition that Mark was writing under the direction of Peter, it remains that the author was Mark; in contrast to the epistles of Peter, which were written by the apostle.

16. Among the more serious arguments against an apostolic authorship are the following (1) The author claims to be a "prophet" and not an "apostle." (2) The author names himself, contrary to John's writings. (3) There are no allusions to incidents in the

is a most significant question. Extremely strong defenses of its apostolic authorship, however, are available from such noted scholars as B. B. Warfield, William Milligan, Henry B. Swete, Donald Guthrie, and Austin Farrer, *[7] to name but a few.

Unity

Third, another very weighty consideration that has been vigorously debated, but which will be assumed in the present research, is the matter of the unity of Revelation. An array of approaches has arisen as to Revelation's original content and composition history, including various emendations by the same writer and numerous editions by later editors. These have been suggested in order to explain some of its alleged disunity.

Furthermore, these matters do have a great bearing upon its date. Moffatt has boldly asserted that "the Neronic date (i.e. soon after Nero's death) exerts most of its fascination on those who cling to too rigid a view of the book's unity, which prevents them from looking' past passages like xi. lf. and xvii. 9f." [18] Even as conservative a scholar as Swete rebuts Lightfoot, Westcott, and Hort for their support of the A.D. 68-69 date due to two presuppositions they hold, one of which is the matter under consideration: "The unity of the Book is assumed, and it is held to be the work of the author of the Fourth Gospel. But the latter hypothesis is open, and perhaps will always be open to doubt; and the former cannot be pressed so far as

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Gospel and no claim to have known Christ personally. (4) There seem to be several uncharacteristic emphases if by the apostle, e.g., God as Majestic Creator (instead of Compassionate Father), Christ as Conqueror (instead of Redeemer), a seven-foldness to the Holy Spirit (rather than a unity). (5) There is a different range of thought, i.e. an omission of characteristically Johannine ideas such. as life, light, truth, grace, and love. (6) Linguistic style. (7) Doubt as to apostolic authorship among Eastern churches. All of these and more are ably answered in the introductions and commentators to be cited next.

17. B. B. Warfield, "Revelation," in Philip Schaff, ed., *A Religious Encyclopedia: Or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883) 3:2034ff. Milligan, *Apocalypse*, pp. 149ff. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. cxx ff. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 932ff. Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), chap. 1. Farrer's demonstration of Johannine authorship is unique in its exposition of the correspondence of the literary patterns between the Gospel and Revelation. Farrer would not be classed as a "conservative" scholar.

18. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine, in* W. R. Nicoll, cd., Englishman's *Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 317.

to exclude the possibility that the extant book is a second edition of an earlier work, or that it incorporates earlier materials." [19]

As tempting as delving into this question is, we will by-pass it, with only occasional reference in later portions of this study. The reasons for by-passing this particular matter are not merely mechanical; that is, they are not totally related to the difficulty of the topic or the bulk of research that would be generated herein (although the latter consideration is certainly legitimate). Rather the rationale for omitting discussion of the matter is more significant and is of a theological nature. The primary reason for its exclusion is due to the obvious difficulty of maintaining the composite and discordant nature of Revelation while defending its canonicity and its revelational quality. How can we maintain a coherent theory of Revelation's inspiration if it has gone through several editions under several different hands? The problem is virtually the same with the more familiar questions related to such books as the Pentateuch and Isaiah, for instance. This is why almost invariably those who have argued for its composite nature are of the liberal school of thought. A secondary reason is due to the intention of the present writer. This treatise is written with an eye not to the liberal theologian, but to the conservative. The plea for a hearing in this research project is toward conservative theologians who stand with the author on the fundamental theological issues, such as the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. The debate engaged is an "intramural" debate among evangelical.

Survey of Scholarly Opinion

In virtually all of the popular literature on Revelation and in much of that which is more scholarly, the assumption often is that *informed* scholarship unanimously demands a late date for Revelation. The impression, if not the actual intent, is given that a scholar's adherence to an early date for Revelation is due either to an ostrich-like avoidance of the facts or to his not being abreast of the literature. For example, Barclay M. Newman, Jr., states: "Among present-day New Testament scholars it is almost unanimously agreed that the book of Revelation was written at a period late in the first century, when the churches of Asia Minor were undergoing persecution by

19. Swete, *Revelation,* p. eiv. It should be noted that Swete opts for tbe Johannine authorship as the most preferable. See above comments.

the Roman Authorities ."[20] The impression is clear: If "present-day" scholarship is "almost unanimously agreed" upon the late date, how shall we be up-to-date if we disagree? In an unusual twist, C. F. D. Moule suggests in his first edition of *The Birth of the New Testament* that perhaps no book *but Revelation* should be dated later than A.D. 70![21] Furthermore, this common assertion overlooks a fairly widespread adherence to an early date among noted classicists, such as B. W. Henderson, A. Weigall, George Edmundson, A. D. Momigliano, and others.

Another means to discredit the early date view is by exposing "embarrassing advocates," i.e. of the radical liberal schools. George Eldon Ladd makes some observations on the preterist approach to Revelation (which is very frequently related to early date advocacy) that tend to diminish its credibility on just such grounds: "But for the preterist interpretation, the Revelation is no more a true prophecy than is its contemporary apocalypse, IV Ezra."[22] Cartledge's argument regarding the preterist view (and, hence, impacting on the early date view) is similar: "Revelation is considered a purely human message of encouragement to the churches. The visions apply to first-century events or are human guesses as to the general future. Many preterists think that the author formed his book by taking the visions from other apocalyptic books that he knew and adapting them to his purposes. "[23] Robert H. Gundry writes in the same vein: "Of course, under this view Revelation turned out to be mistaken — Jesus did not return quickly although the Roman Empire did fall and Christianity continued. Consequently preterists attempt to salvage the significance of the book for modern times by resorting also to the idealist view. Preterists are prone to infer a utilization of pagan mythology throughout Revelation."[24]

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20. Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *Rediscovering the Book of Revelation* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1968), p. 11.

21. C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), pp. 121-123. Later, however, he changed his position, after the publication of John A. T. Robinson's *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976). See footnote on Moule in the list of scholars below.

22. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 621.

23. Samuel A. Cartledge, *A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1938), p. 172.

24. Robert H. Gundry, *Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 366.

The problem with such observations is that they have failed to recognize a critical distinction between preterists of radical, naturalistic liberalism (e.g., the Tubingen school) and those of evangelical, supernaturalistic orthodoxy (e.g., Moses Stuart, Milton Terry, and Philip Schaff). In point of fact, however, "there is a radical difference between those Preterists who acknowledge a real prophecy and permanent truth in the book, and the rationalistic Preterists who regard it as a dream of a visionary which was falsified by events."[25]

Of course, not all late date proponents so readily write off early date advocacy. Signs are presently emerging that indicate that this tendency to discount early date arguments may be changing. Late date advocate Leon Morris recognizes the relative strength of the early date argument when he writes: "There appear to be two dates only for which any considerable arguments are available, in the time of the Emperor Domitian, or in or just after that of Nero."[26] And he is less than dogmatic in establishing his own position when he states that "while the evidence is far from being so conclusive that no other view is possible, on the whole it seems that a date in the time of Domitian, i.e., c. A.D. 90-95, best suits the facts."[27] Peake speaks similarly of the matter: "It may be granted that the case for a date in the reign of Domitian has been sometimes overstated. But this date is *probably* to be accepted."[28] J. P. M. Sweet agrees: "We have assumed so far that the book was written well after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, but the evidence is far from conclusive. . . . To sum up, the earlier date *may* be right, but the internal evidence is not sufficient to outweigh the firm tradition stemming from Irenaeus. "[29] Gundry's position indicates this awareness: "The traditional and *probable* date of Revelation is the reign of Domitian. "[30] A telling admission, it seems, has been made by renowned commentator and late date advocate R. H. Charles: "It thus follows that the

25. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, 8* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:837-838.

26. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 34.

27. *Ibid.*, p. *40.*

28. Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919), p. 96. Emphasis mine.

29. J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*. Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia Westminster, 1979), pp. 21, 27.

30. Gundry, Suing *of the New Testament*, p. 365, Emphasis mine.

date of the Apocalypse, according to [the Preterist] school, was about 67-68 or thereabouts. And if the absolute unity of the Apocalypse be assumed, there is no possibility, I think, of evading this conclusion. "[31] Nevertheless, the widespread assumption still remains that "all scholars know" that Revelation was written toward the end of the first century, in the mid-A.D. 90s.

The Ebb and Flow of Scholarly Opinion

In his *Redating the New Testament*, Robinson provides a helpful survey of the historical ebb and flow of scholarly opinion on the matter of the chronology of all the New Testament books. This ebb and flow quite naturally had its effect on Revelation dating. His survey provides the following general analysis based on 50-year increments.[32]

Around 1800 dates for the New Testament canon ranged very conservatively between A.D. 50 and A.D. 100. By 1850, due to the Tubingen school of thought and under the special influence of F. C. Baur, the range of dates had widened from A.D. 50+ to A.D. 160 +. Regarding Revelation's date under the sway of Tubingen, "it was a striking paradox that the Tubingen School which left Paul with only four or, as put by Hilgenfeld in a more moderate form, with only seven authentic Epistles, and brought most of the New Testament documents down to a late date, should in the case of the Apocalypse have affirmed apostolic authorship and a date quarter of a century earlier than that assigned by tradition."[33]

But by 1900 the prodigious labors of conservative scholars – particularly J. B. Lightfoot and Theodore Zahn – had caused a drastic modification. Conservatives were again able to argue confidently and compellingly for dates within the tolerable A.D. 50 to A.D. 100 range for the New Testament canon.[34] The liberal school

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31. R. H. Charles, *Studies in the Apocalypse* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), p. 57. On pages 58ff., Charles sets out to demonstrate the book should not be considered a unity. Simcox comments in this regard: "Ten years ago when it was still generally assumed that all the visions arid signs were recorded by one writer at one time, most foreign critics were disposed to admit both St. John's authorship and the early date." See William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John Divine*. The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge 1898), p. xxxix.

32. Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 3ff.

33. Peake, *Revelation*, p. 77.

34. See for example, James Hastings, cd., *Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols. (New York:

was in turmoil; for example, Harnack offered the widest range of dates – between A.D. 48 and A.D. 175. The radical critics were "oscillating wildly" at the turn of the century .35

Regarding Revelation studies in this era between 1850 and 1900, Schaff admits to having held to a late date originally, only eventually to accept an early date upon further research.[36] Schaff could even write: "The early date [of Revelation] is now accepted by perhaps the majority of scholars."[37] Even late date advocate William Milligan admits: "Recent scholarship has, with little exception, decided in favour of the earlier and not the later date."[38] Hort comments that in his day "the general tendency of criticism has been towards the view that the circumstances and events present to the writer's eye are not those of Domitian's time, and are those of the time between Nero's persecution (about 64) and the fall of Jerusalem (70), i.e. at least 25 years earlier than on the common view."[39] Another late date advocate, Peake, writes: "In deference to our earliest evidence, the statement of Irenaeus, the Book was generally considered to belong to the close of Domitian's reign; but during the greater part of the nineteenth century there was a strong majority of critics in favour of a date some quarter of a century earlier. This view was entertained by both advanced and conservative scholars. But some time before the close of the last century opinion began to move back to the traditional date, and for several years it has secured the adhesion of the great majority of scholars."[40] Early date advocates were as confident then as late date advocates have been later in the present century. Farrar asserts that "there can be no reasonable doubt respecting the date of the Apocalypse."[41] He speaks of it as a "certain

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Scribners, 1898-1904); B. W. Bacon, *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1900); and Theodore Zahn, *Introduction to New Testament*, 4 vols. (Leipzig 1897-1899).

35. Robinson, *Redating*, p. 6.

36. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3rd cd., 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:834. See his *History of the Christian Church (1st* cd., 1853), pp. 418ff., for his earlier position.

37. Schaff's editorial note to Warfield's "Revelation" article in Schaff, *Encyclopedia* 3:2036.

38. Milligan, *Apocalypse*, p. 75.

39. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: Z-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. x.

40. Peake, *Revelation*, p. 70.

41. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, 1884), p. 387.

conclusion"[42] and notes that "the whole weight of evidence now tends to prove" it.[43] Terry follows suit when he observes that "the trend of modem criticism is unmistakably toward the adoption of the early date of the Apocalypse."[44]

Robinson goes on to note in regard to the general dating trends relative to the whole New Testament that by 1950 there was witnessed a narrowing of the gap between liberal and orthodox scholars, approaching even some degree of consensus .45

In order to dispel the common, but erroneous, notion of the fixity and unanimity of scholarly opinion in regard to the date of Revelation – a notion that is particularly frustrating to debate – we shall provide a catena of scholars of both the past and present who affirm an early date for Revelation. As this is done it must be kept in mind that the scholars cited are of the *general* camp of those who posit an early date for Revelation. The list should not be taken as one that indicates a thorough-going and harmonious agreement as to the *exact* date and circumstances of the writing. Nor, unfortunately, is there even agreement among these scholars as to the inspiration of Revelation. Some, indeed, are of the various liberal schools of biblical interpretation. [46] Unlike the situation in Old Testament studies, the conservative and liberal camps are not divided over the issue of dating, with the liberals opting for a late date.

It should further be borne in mind that truth is not founded either upon majority rule or upon the eminence of a scholar's reputation. The following listing of pre-A.D. 70 scholars is not given with a view to *establishing the* early date argument. It is simply proffered to ward off naive and misconceived initial objections to considering the argument — objections of the order: "but New Testament scholars are agreed. . . ."

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42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 404-405.

44. Terry, *Hermeneutus*, p. 241n.

45, Robinson, *Redating,* p. 6.

46. Rather than diminishing their usefulness in this survey, this enhances it, for two reasons: (1) The presence of those of liberal persuasion demonstrates that the position is not held simply as a matter of doctrinal bias; and (2) the liberal biblical scholar is keenly interested in historical matters (such as the question of the date of Revelation) and frequently provides important insights into such historical questions.

Source Documentation

We will cite only those authors who by their noteworthy and scholarly labors merit a careful hearing. There are numerous lesser works that promote a pre-A.D. 75 date that we could set forth as defenses of the early date view; these are omitted as inconsequential.[47] Where possible we will employ original documentation. Where this has not been possible, we will note the sources from which we discovered their positions. No secondary source that is at all of dubious scholarly distinction will be given consideration. The numbers in braces [ ] that *precede* the immediately following list of secondary sources will be used at the end of each source entry in the catena below. Some entries in the catena will have multiple sources.

[1] Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Book of Revelation: Its Setting" (unpublished research paper, 1984), pp. 14f.

[2] Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible,* vol. 6 (Nashville: rep. n.d.), p. 961.

[3] Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York: Cassell, 1884), p. 408.

[4] Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919).

[5] John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 225.

[6] Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church,* vol. 1: *Apostolic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950), p. 834.

[7] Henry B. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. ciii.

[8] Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), pp. 241n, 467.

Catena of Early Date Advocates

The following listing is arranged in alphabetical, rather than

47. For example: Robert L. Pierce, *The Rapture Cult* (Signal Mtn., TN: Signal Point Press, 1986); Ed Stevens, *What Happened in 70 A. D.?* (Ashtabula, Ohio North East Ohio Bible Inst., 1981); Max R. King, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Warren, OH: by the author, 1971); Ulrich R. Beeson, *The Revelation* (Birmingham, AL: by the author, 1956); Jessie E. Mills, *Survey of the Book of Revelation* (Bonifay, FL by the author, n.d.).

chronological order, for easy reference.

Firmin Abauzit, *Essai sur 1' Apocalypse* (Geneva: 1730). [1, 6]

Jay E. Adams, *The Time is at Hand* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966).

Luis de Alcasar, *Vestigatio arcani Sensus in Apocalypsi* (Antwerp: 1614). *[6]*

B. Aubé. [6, 3]

Karl August Auberlen, *Daniel and Revelation in Their Mutual Relation* (Andover: 1857). [3, 8]

Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Book of Revelation: Its Setting" (unpublished paper, 1984).

Arthur Stapylton Barnes, *Christianity at Rome in the Apostolic Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, [1938] 1971), pp. 159ff.

James Vernon Bartlet, *The Apostolic Age: Its Life, Doctrine, Worship, and Polity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, [1899] 1963), Book 2, pp. 388ff. [1]

Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 3rd ed. (Tubingen: 1863). [3,4, 6, 7]

Albert A. Bell, Jr., "The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reconsidered," *New Testament Studies 25* (1978):93-102.

Leonhard Bertholdt, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in die sämmtlichen kanonischen u. apocryphischen Schriften des A. und N. Testaments*, vol. *4* (1812-1819).[48]

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PART II

THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

3

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

The actual defense of the early date of Revelation will be begun by initially considering the external evidence. This species of evidence is greatly stressed by late date advocates and is generally conceded on all sides to be their strongest argument. Indeed, F. J. A. Hort even states in regard to the evidence for a late date: "This is virtually external only."[1] Though this undoubtedly is an overstatement,[2] the fact remains that late date advocates do make much of the external evidence. For instance, J. P. M. Sweet's comment is illustrative in this regard: "To sum up, the earlier date *may* be right, but the internal evidence is not sufficient to outweigh the firm tradition stemming from Irenaeus."[3] Similarly, Feuillet writes: "The *traditional* setting of the Apocalypse in the reign of Domitian is too solidly established to be brought into question."[4]

John's Banishment

The evidence from tradition regarding the date of Revelation is almost invariably considered in conjunction with the question of the

1. F. J. A. Hort, *The* Apocalypse *of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. xiv.

2. This may have been closer to an accurate assessment in Hort's era, but today it seems much too bold a statement. Indeed, Leon Morris in his (admittedly non-technical, though excellent) commentary *on* Revelation allows only a passing reference to Irenaeus (and the entire external evidence!) in one footnote, when discussing the date (The *Revelation of St. John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969], p. 34, n. 5). This is, however, most unusual for modem treatments.

3. J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*. Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), p. 27.

4. Andre Feuillet, *The Apocalypse* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965), p. 92. See also Peake: "In deference to our earliest evidence, the statement of Irenaeus, the Book was generally considered to belong to the close of Domitian's reign ." (Arthur S. Peake, The *Revelation of John* [London: Joseph Johnson, 1919], p. 70).

date of John's banishment to the island of Patmos. Interestingly, there have been several able scholars who have denied that John was *banished* to Patmos. For instance, Terry holds that John was simply retreating to Patmos to preach the gospel. He suggests three evidences for this interpretation:[5] (1) The Greek preposition διά could mean "for the sake of," i.e. John had gone to Patmos "for the sake of receiving the Word of God. " (2) The references to "tribulation" and "patience," he argues, do not necessarily relate to the reason for his being at Patmos. (3) The preposition διά is used in this sense in several places in Revelation (cf. 2:3; 4:11; 12:11; 13:14; 18:10, 15; 20:4). Peake noted that this was the view of Friedrich Bleek, Eduard W. E. Reuss, Adolf Harnack, and Wilhelm Bousset.[6] Reuss even goes so far as to say: "The exile of the Apostle John to Patmos . . . is itself only a fable derived from a false interpretation of 1:9 (in which very passage μαρτυρίον is not martyrdom but preaching)."[7] More recently, Newman suggests the possibility that John's sojourn there "was likely nothing more than 'protective custody,' if indeed that much."[8]

Despite such vigorous protestations against the notion of a banishment, the fact of John's banishment seems indisputably clear to the candid mind. In Revelation 1:9 John speaks of his being in "the tribulation" (Gk: ἐν τῇ θλίψει) with the saints; and the traumatic content of much of his book would support this conclusion. In addition, it is difficult to conceive of the διά being applied to a future purpose, i.e. that John went there with the view to preaching the Gospel. Then, too, we must ask why he chose the barren, virtually deserted island of Patmos to do so? Furthermore, despite disagreements as to the *time* of John's banishment, there is virtual harmony in antiquity as to the *fact* of his banishment.[9]

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5. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), p. 239.

6. Peake, *Revelation,* p. 2 15n.

7. Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, *History of the Sawed Scriptures of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1884), p. 161.

8. Barclay Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis. Critique of the Irenaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historical Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse," New *Testament Studies* 10 *(1962-63):138.*

9. *See* Frederick W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christanity (New* York Cassell, 1884), pp. 386-387. Cf. Epiphanies, *Heresies* 51:33; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:30:3; Tertullian, On *the Exclusion* of *Heretics* 36; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:18; 20:23; Clement of

The Role of Tradition

In order to demonstrate the weight credited the church fathers by late date advocates, we will cite the introductory assertions of several competent late date theorists. Following these citations we will provide a survey of the evidence, such as it is.

Henry B. Swete insists that "early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian."[10] In his monumental commentary on Revelation, R. H. Charles introduces the external evidence as follows: "This evidence almost unanimously assigns [Revelation] to the last years of Domitian."[11] Donald Guthrie follows the lead of Swete, Charles, and others – albeit, in somewhat more cautious tones – when he asserts that "undoubtedly a strong argument in favour of a Domitianic date is the fact that the earliest and the weightiest external witnesses attest it."[12]

Often (though by no means always) it is the case that the internal evidence employed by late date advocates is essentially used in a negative sense to rebut early date arguments, rather than being employed positively to establish the late date. The external evidence is quite important to late date advocacy. The authorities invariably cited by these scholars, and virtually all late date advocates, are: Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorious, Eusebius, and Jerome.[13]

Alexandria, *Who is the Rich Man that shall be Saved? 42;* Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 9; Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2:31; Theophylact; and the Syriac Revelation.

10. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977) pp. xcix ff.

11. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John,* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1920) 1:xci.

12. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction,* 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970) p. 956.

13. See for example: Swete, *Revelation,* p. c.; Charles, *Revelation* 1:xciii; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 32; James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 320; Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes* on *the New Testament,* 1 vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, rep. 1962), pp. 1531ff.; B. B. Warfield, "Revelation," in Philip Schaff, cd., *A Religious Encyclopedia: Or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal,* and *Practical Theology (New* York Funk and Wagnalls, 1883) 3:2035; Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), pp. 317ff.; Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 956-957; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 13ff.; Merrill C. Tenney, "Revelation, Book of" in Merrill C. Tenney, cd., *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 721.

Yet, despite a confident use of these witnesses by late date proponents, we will demonstrate that a careful scrutiny of the material reveals that the evidence is too diverse to lead to any assured conclusion as to this date. Moses Stuart (who late date advocate James Moffatt claims provided one of only two pre-Alford works that "retain any critical value" regarding Revelation) [14] states well the situation regarding John's banishment, and thus of the date of Revelation, when he writes: "Beyond the testimony of John himself, there is such a diversity of views, as serves to show that mere floating reports and surmises were the basis of the views. Were not this the case, how could there have been so great a variety of opinions about a simple matter of fact?'15

Although our primary concern will be to provide an analytical inquiry into the late date evidence from Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, a survey of evidence from other early church fathers will round out the evaluation of the external evidence. The evidence provided in Part II of the present work is presented with a view to demonstrating that: (1) Much of the late date external evidence is, in fact, inconclusive at best. (2) There is some noteworthy early evidence for a Neronic banishment of John and a pre-A.D. 70 writing of Revelation.

William Henry Simcox states that "there are statements in early Christian writers which seem to show that the tradition on this point was not absolutely unanimous." [16] The generally accepted dates-from a few of the notable witnesses yield a wide range of diverse conclusions, including a pre-Vespasianic date (Epiphanies, Theophylact, the Syriac Revelation manuscripts), a Domitianic date (Irenaeus, Jerome, Eusebius, Sulpicius Severus, Victorious), and a Trajanic date (Dorotheus). But beyond these few church fathers there are other historical witnesses, as well.

Let us, then, begin our inquiry into the various ancient sources that lend themselves to the debate. Following separate treatments of Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, the remaining survey will cover the additional evidence in chronological succession.

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14. Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 333.

15, Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Mot-s-ill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1:271.

16. William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John Divine*. The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge University Press, 1898), p. xiii.

4

IRENAEUS, BISHOP OF LYONS

As we begin consideration of the external evidence, the obvious starting point is with Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons. Irenaeus is considered to be the most important witness and deserves initial consideration for several reasons. First, he speaks directly (it seems) to the issue at hand. Guthrie writes that Irenaeus "is quite specific that the Apocalypse 'was seen no such long time ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian.'"[1] Second, he is an indisputably important church father whose very stature demands his hearing. Irenaeus's dates are A.D. 130-202. Third, he wrote the very work in question around A.D. 180 to 190,[2] just a little over a century after the destruction of the Temple (the era significant to early date advocacy) and almost a century after Domitian's reign (the era significant to late date advocacy). As Henderson observes, Irenaeus is "the earliest extant authority" designating a date for the writing of Revelation.[3] Fourth, he claims to have known Polycarp,[4] who in turn

1. Donald Guthrie, New Testament *Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 956.

2. Late date advocate Arthur S. Peake writes: "Irenaeus wrote his great work about A.D. 180-190" (T/u *Revelation of John* [London: Joseph Johnson, 1919] p. 72 in). Most classical, historical, and New Testament scholars agree. See for example, Henderson, Nero, p. 442; Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) I:281; John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1976), p. 221; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1984), p. 921.

3. B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London: Methuen, 1903), p. 442,

4. See *Against Heresies* 3:3:4: "But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna whom I also saw in my early youth" (Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF], 10* vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (late 19th c.) 1975] I:416).

may have known the Apostle John,[5] the writer of Revelation.

Thus, with regard to the external evidence, the tendency of late date advocates to rely heavily on Irenaeus is not unreasonable. Such a dependence is clearly indicated in Peake's commentary: "In deference to our earliest evidence, the statement of Irenaeus, the Book was generally considered to belong to the close of Domitian's reign."[6] Terry observes that "Ellicott, Hengstenberg, Lange, Alford, and Whedan contend strongly that the testimony of Irenaeus and the ancient tradition *ought to control the question.*"[7]

Undoubtedly, Irenaeus's observation is the strongest weapon in the late date arsenal. Certainly, "the chief obstacle to the acceptance of the true date of the Apocalypse, arises from the authority of Irenaeus."[8] Irenaeus is an "obstacle" who cannot be overlooked by the early date school.

The evidence from Irenaeus that is deemed so compelling is found in Book 5 of his *Against Heresies* (at *5:30:3).* Although originally composed in Greek, today this work exists in its entirety only in Latin translation. Thankfully, however, the particular statement in question is preserved for us in the original Greek in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* at 3:18:3 (see also 5:8:6):

> *εἰ δὲ ἔδει ἀναφανδὸν ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ κηρύττεσθαι τοὔνομα αὐτοῦ, δι' ἐκείνου ἂν ἐρρέθη τοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ἑορακότος. οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς, πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Δομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς.*

This crucial statement occurs at the end of a section in which Irenaeus is dealing with the identification of "666" in Revelation 13. That statement, along with its larger context, is generally translated:

> We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been an-

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5. See the almost universal testimony to the Johannine discipleship of Polycarp in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:3; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:20; *3:36;* Jerome, *Chronicle; Concerning Illustrious Men 17;* Suidas; and Tertullian, *On the Exclusion of Heretics 32.*

6. Peake, *Revelation,* p. 70.

7. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), p. 241 n. Emphasis mine.

8. Frederick W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York Cassell, 1884), p. 407.

> nounced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.[9]

The ἑωράθη ("that was seen") is commonly considered to refer back to the immediately preceding noun, ἀποκάλυψις ("Revelation" or "apocalyptic vision"), in the preceding sentence. Irenaeus is affirming, it is argued, that John "saw" (i.e., received by vision) the prophecies of Revelation at a time fitting the late date theory of composition: "no such long time ago," "almost in our own generation," and, more precisely, "at the end of the reign of Domitian."

As the external evidence section of the present study is developed, additional ancient historical witnesses will be considered. But the importance of this evidence found in Irenaeus's work is universally recognized and demands careful and lengthy consideration. How shall early date advocates deal with such strong and forthright testimony by this noteworthy ancient church father? As a matter of fact, there are several considerations that tend to reduce the usefulness of Irenaeus for late date advocacy. These will be brought forward in some detail.

The Translational Problem

Certainly the two initial considerations in any judgment regarding the interpretation of a crucial documentary witness are those of textual certainty and translational accuracy. In that there are no crucial questions regarding the integrity of the text of Irenaeus's statement raised from either camp in the debate, we can move directly to consideration of the matter of translational accuracy.

On the matter of translation there has been a good deal of debate on various aspects of the statement in question. In fact, "this translation has been disputed by a number of scholars."[10] According to Peake and Farrar the problem of translational accuracy was first broached by J. J. Wetstein in 1751.][1] We should note at the outset, however, that most scholars doubt there is a problem of translation. For instance, Robinson (an early date advocate) speaks of the alleged

9. *ANF* 1:559-560.
10. Robinson, Redating, p. 221.
11. Farrar, *Early Days*, p. 44)8; Peake, *Revelation*, p. 73.

translational problem as "very dubious." [12] Moffatt (a vigorous late date advocate) discounts the supposed problem with just one sentence, stating that the proposed revisions are "ingenious but quite unconvincing." [13] According to Barnes, Chapman "is frankly contemptuous" against the proposed reconstruction of Irenaeus.'4 There are, however, a number of noted scholars who have disputed various parts of the common translation. Among these are J. J. Wetstein, M. J. Bovan, S. H. Chase, E. Böhmer, James M. Macdonald, Henry Hammond, F. J. A. Hort, Edward C. Selwyn, George Edmundson, Arthur S. Barnes, and J. J. Scott. [15]

Three of the major problems with the generally accepted translation will be dealt with below: (1) The referent of *ἑωράθη* ("was seen"). *(2)* The significance of the time reference: *οὐδὲ yelp πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς* ("no long time ago was it seen, but almost in our own time"). (3) The overall internal confusion in Irenaeus suggested by the incompatibility of Irenaeus's statements on Revelation. [16]

The Referent of ἑωράθη

Indisputably, the most serious potential objection to the common translation has to do with the understanding of *ἑωράθη*, "was seen." What is the subject of this verb? Is it "him who saw the Apocalypse"

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12. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 221.

13. James Moffatt, The *Revelation of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 319.

14. Arthur Stapylton Barnes, *Christianity at Rome in the Apostolic Age* (Westport, CT Greenwood, [1938] 1971), p. 167n.

15. J. J. Wetstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum,* vol. 2 (1751), p. 746. M. J. Bovan, *Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie* (Lausanne: 1887). S. H. Chase, "The Date of the Apocalypse The Evidence of Irenaeus," *Journal of Theological Studies 8 (1907): 431-434.* Hort noted the significance of this article; see Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. cvi. E. Böhmer, *Über Verfasser* und *Abfassungszeit des Apokalypse,* pp. 30ff.; cited in Moffatt, Revelation, p. 505. James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), pp. 169ff. Henry Hammond, *A Paraphrase and Annotations Upon the New Testament,* 4th ed. (London: 1653), p. 857; cited in Peake, *Revelation,* p. 74n. Edward C. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1900). George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome sn the First Century* (London: Longmans, Green, 1913). Barnes, *Christianity at Rome,* pp. 167ff. Barnes cites also Sanday, from his Preface to F. J. A. Hort, The *Apocalypse of St. John: I-III,* and Hilgenfeld as adherents to this view. J. J. Scott, The *Apocalypse, or Revelation of S. John the Divine* (London: John Murray, 1909), p. 154.

16. There is another area where some scholars have deemed there to be a problem with the common interpretation of Irenaeus's statement. Taking the lead of Guericke, a

(i.e., John) or "the Apocalypse"? Which of these two antecedents "was seen" "almost" in Irenaeus's time and near "the end of the reign of Domitian"? Swete records for us a significant observation from master expositor F. J. A. Hort: "Dr. Hort, it appears, in his lectures on the Apocalypse referred to an article by M. J. Bovan in the *Revue de Theologie et de Philosophie* (Lausanne, 1887), in which it was suggested that the subject of *ἑωράθη* in Iren. v. 30.3 is not *ἡ ἀποκάλυψις* but *ὁ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ἑορακότος*, i.e. *ὁ Ἰωάννης*."[17] Such is all the more significant when we consider the observations of the first English translators of Irenaeus:

> The great work of Irenaeus, now for the first time translated into English, is unfortunately no longer extant in the original. It has come down to us only in an ancient Latin version, with the exception of the greater part of the first book, which has been preserved in the original Greek, through means of copious quotations made by Hippolytus and Epiphanies. The text, both Latin and Greek, is often most uncertain. . . .
>
> Irenaeus, even in the original Greek, is often a very obscure writer. At times he expresses himself with remarkable clearness and terseness; but, upon the whole, his style is very involved and prolix.[18]

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few expositors have called into question the proper understanding of Irenaeus's *Δομετιανοῦ*. Guericke is bothered by the absence of the definite article before *Δομετιανοῦ*. Stuart relates his argument thus: "Guericke suggests, that when Irenaeus says, 'the Apocalypse was seen not long ago, but almost in our generation, *πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Δομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς*,' that the adjective *Δομετιανοῦ*, (for *adjective* it may be, and if so, it is one which is *generis communis*, and not the proper name of Domitian), belongs, in accordance with the Greek formation, to the name *Domitius*, and not to Domitian which would make an adjective of the form *Δομιτιανικός*. If it were a proper name, he says it should be written *τοῦ Δομετιάνου*. Now Nero's name was *Domitius Nero*, and not Domitianus, which is the name of the later emperor" (Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1 :282-283n). If such a re-interpretation of the phrase is permissible, and if we interpret the first portion of the sentence from Irenaeus along the common lines, then this would make Irenaeus testify that the Apocalypse was written near the end of the reign of Nero.

This particular approach to the Domitian identity is very rarely held even among convinced early date advocates. Farrar *says* that "no scholar will accept this hypothesis" (Farrar, *Early Days*, p. 407). (This must be an overstatement, since Guericke was a reputable scholar.) Stuart doubts its validity, as did Macdonald. Not only does it seem abundantly clear that Irenaeus intended the Emperor Domitian by this reference, but the argument above is much stronger, more widely held, and to be preferred.

17. Swete, Revelation, p. cvi. Although it should be noted that Swete comments that Hort did not accept Bovan's argument calling for such a re-interpretation of Irenaeus.

18. *ANF 1:311-312.* The translation and introductory remarks were by Alexander Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, according to the first edition of the translation: *The Writings of Irenaeus*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1880).

S. H. Chase, the writer of one of the most persuasive and comprehensive articles on this matter, heard Hort's May, 1889, lecture and recorded some of that very lecture:

> My note is as follows . . . : – 'The passage of Irenaeus is urged against dating the Apocalypse shortly after Nero's death. A suggestion, however, has been made in a French periodical: it is a question of the interpretation of Irenaeus. The writer raised the question whether Irenaeus means to say that the Apocalypse itself belongs to Domitian's reign. What is the subject of ἑωράθη? *He* or *it*? For the latter note the phrase just used [i.e. τοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν ἑορακότος]. But there is the fact that the language of Irenaeus is difficult on this [i.e. the common] theory. Why *yap?* But if Irenaeus meant that he, John, was seen, this is in accordance with his favourite phraseology.'19

For Hort, the γάρ ("for") in Irenaeus's statement is syntactically difficult to account for unless it makes reference back to the *main* idea of the preceding statement: "it [the name of the Beast] *would have been spoken by him.*" Chase notes that Irenaeus is fond of γάρ in such contexts, which lends support to the re-interpretation of Irenaeus at this point .[20] Hort also recognizes the general tendency of Irenaeus to use ὁράω with persons, rather than of visions or things (such as a book, as here, i.e. Revelation). For as Swete comments of Hort's position: "he admitted 'the difficulty of accounting for γάρ on the common interpretation, and the force of the argument from the use of ὁράω.'"[21]

Chase moves beyond the purely grammatical ambiguity relative to syntactical structure to the actual thematic flow of the passage cited:

> The logic of the sentences seems to me to require this interpretation. The statement that the vision was seen at the close of Domitian's reign supplies no reason why the mysterious numbers should have been expounded "by him who saw the apocalypse," had he judged such an exposition needful. If, on the other hand, we refer ἑωράθη to St John, the meaning is plain and simple. We may expand the sentences thus: "Had it been needful that the explanation of the name should be proclaimed to the men of our own day, that explanation would

19. S. H. Chase, "The Date of the Apocalypse," *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (1907):43 1.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 432. He cites sections from Irenaeus (2:22:5; 3:3:3; 3:3:4) indicating Irenaeus's usage.

21. Swete, *Revelation*, p. cvi.

> have been given by the author of the Book. For the author was seen on earth, he lived and held converse with his disciples, not so very long ago, but almost in our own generation. Thus, on the one hand, he lived years after he wrote the Book, and there was abundant opportunity for him to expound the riddle, had he wished to do so; and, on the other hand, since he lived on almost into our generation, the explanation, had he given it, must have been preserved to Us."[22]

Chase's observations are quite perceptive. Upon recognizing the ambiguity of the passage when narrowly conceived in terms of purely grammatico-syntactical analysis, he then proceeds upon sound hermeneutic principle to elucidate Irenaeus's precise point by consideration of the contextual flow.

This sort of argumentation is why Wetstein, too, understood "John" (which immediately preceding the verb becomes "him who saw the apocalypse") to be the nominative of ἑωράθη, rather than "Revelation."[23] Macdonald agrees, and states the case dogmatically:

> [Irenaeus] argues that if this knowledge [i.e., regarding the identity of 666] had been important at that time it would have been communicated by the writer of the Apocalypse, who lived so near their own time. . . . There was therefore really no ambiguity to be avoided, requiring him to use the name ofJohn or the personal pronoun as the subject of ἑωράθη, the verb of sight. The scope requires this nominative and no other.[24]

But there is still more to the contextual argument. In his *Ecclesiastical History (5:8:5,6)* Eusebius again cites Irenaeus's statement *(Against Heresies 5:30:3),* this time with more of the context *(Against Heresies* 5:30:1):

> He states these things in the third book of his above-mentioned work. In the fifth book he speaks as follows concerning the Apocalypse of John, and the number of the name of Antichrist "As these things are so, and this number is found in all the approved and ancient copies, and those who saw John face to face confirm it, and reason teaches us that the number of the name of the beast, according to the mode

22. Chase, "Date," pp. 431-432.

23. See James M. Macdonald, *The Life* and *Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), p. 170. He also noted that Guericke once held this view, but later retracted it. See also Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:265.

24. Macdonald, *Life and Writings,* p. 169.

> of calculation among the Greeks, appears in its letters. . . ." And farther on he says concerning the same: "We are not bold enough to speak confidently of the name of Antichrist. For if it were necessary that his name should be declared clearly at the present time, it would have been announced by who saw the revelation. For it was seen, not long ago, but almost in our generation, toward the end of the reign of Domitian."[25]

Notice should be made of the *personal* knowledge that is emphasized by Irenaeus: "those who have seen John face to face testify." It rather clearly seems that the ἑωράθη ("was seen") of the latter quotation (the very one under consideration) is but the dim reflection of the former quotation's more precise statement: μαρτυρούντων αὐτῶν ἐκείνων τῶν κατ4 ὄψιν τὸν 'Ιωάννην ἑορακότων ("those who have seen John face to face testify"). In fact, the very verb in question (ὁράω, at *Heresies* 5:30:3) appears in this immediate context (in *Against Heresies 5:30:1)* employed of John himself 'Ιωάννην ἑορακότων.[26] Furthermore, "this interpretation is in harmony with the characteristic thought and phraseology of Irenaeus. "[27] By this is meant that Irenaeus constantly emphasizes the organic and living unity of the Church's life. Irenaeus shows a concern to demonstrate carefully that one Christian generation is in touch with the next generation since the time of the apostles. "The men of one generation heard from the lips of the men of the previous generation what they themselves had heard and seen. "[28] We must recognize that Irenaeus's work sought to demonstrate that "the same gospel which was first orally preached and transmitted was subsequently committed to writing and faithfully preserved in all the apostolic churches through the regular succession of the bishops and elders. "[29]

In the 1913 Bampton Lectures at the University of Oxford, George Edmundson offered his analysis of the problem, which is

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25. Eusebius, 5:8:5-6. Cited from Philip Schaff and Henry Waee, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series, 14* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1890] 1986) 1:222.

26. Macdonald, *Life and Writings,* p. 169.

27. Chase, "Date," p. 432.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 433. He cites references from Irenaeus's work at 3:3:3; 427:1; 5:30:1; and even fragments of a letter preserved in Eusebius's work at 5:20.

29. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, 8* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 2:753. Cp. F. F. Bruce, New *Testament History* (Garden City, NY Anchor Books, 1969), p. 405.

along the lines of Chase's:

> But surely this rendering [i.e., the common rendering of Irenaeus] is wrong. It should be "for he (St. John the writer) was seen . . . almost in our generation toward the end of the reign of Domitian." It is of the Seer and his ability to declare the name of Antichrist that Irenaeus is speaking. The misunderstanding about the meaning of the passage is largely due to Eusebius, who after a reference to Domitian's persecution proceeds "in this (persecution) report [he] affirms that the Apostle and Evangelist John, who was still living, in consequence of his testimony to the divine word was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos," and then he quotes Irenaeus in support of his statement.[30]

Edmundson feels that Eusebius imparted this wrong historical data as a result of reading too much into Origen's comments on Matthew 20:22. That is, apparently Eusebius merely assumed that John was exiled to Patmos under Domitian, based on Origen's obscure comment.[31] Edmundson thus surmised that this led Eusebius astray in his historical arrangement of the data at this point.

A further reason for Irenaeus's emphasis is that "to say of one 'he was seen,' meaning thereby he was still alive at a certain time, might seem unusual, whether in Greek or English, as applied to an ordinary man. When we consider, however, how much would be thought of seeing this most aged apostle who had seen the Lord, there is nothing unnatural in the use of such an expression. In fact this verb is applied to him in precisely the same sense in the beginning of the chapter."[32]

The evidence rehearsed above has not convinced everyone. Even early date advocates such as Hort, Stuart, Guericke, and Robinson[33] fail to endorse such a re-interpretation of Irenaeus. Stuart dismisses

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30. Edmundson, *Church in Rome*, pp. 164-165. His reference to Eusebius is to his *Ecclesiastical History 3:23:1.*

31. We will consider this statement from Origen later in this part of our work. It should be noted here, however, that Origen does not mention the name "Domitian" in his statement. Simcox suggests that Irenaeus may have merely assumed Domitian used banishment more than Nero (William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine.* The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges [Cambridge University Press, 1898], p. xl).

32. Macdonald, *Life and Writings*, pp. 169-170.

33. On Hort's position, see Swete, *Revelation*, p. cvi. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:265, writes: "And although the *heorathe*, in the passage of Irenaeus . has been differently interpreted by different critics (e. g. the ancient translator of Irenaeus renders it *visum est*, viz. the beast; Wetstein applies the verb to John himself; Storr, to the name of the beast), yet

the re-interpretation on the grounds that "the ancients clearly understood the matter" along the lines of the common interpretation.[34] Robinson points out two problems that appear to him to be fatal to the re-interpretation of Irenaeus. 35 The first is that the Latin translation of Irenaeus stands against it by its use of *visum* (which better suggests a thing, such as a book), instead of *visa* (which is more suggestive of a person). This argument is closely related to Stuart's. The second is that Irenaeus twice elsewhere says John lived to Trajan's reign, not just to Domitian's.[36] If Irenaeus is to be re-interpreted here along the lines of Chase and others then there would seem to be some confusion in Irenaeus's record.

In response to these three objections, we offer the following explanations. First, regarding Stuart's statement that the early fathers seemed to have understood him in terms of the common interpretation, it should be noted that although many ancient fathers employed Irenaeus with high regard, they do not seem to have regarded him as a final authority. For instance, contrary to Irenaeus, Tertullian placed John's banishment after his being dipped in a cauldron of burning oil, which Jerome says was in Nero's reign.[37] Photus preserved extracts of "Life of Timotheus" in which he states that John's banishment was under Nero. Others who record a pre-Domitianic date for John's banishment include: Epiphanies (*Heresies 51:12,* 33), Arethas (*Revelation 7:1-8),* the Syriac versions of Revelation, *History of John, the Son of Zebedee,* and Theophylact *(John).* Though Eusebius quotes Irenaeus as proof of the date to which John lived (i.e., into the reign of Trajan),38 he disagrees with Irenaeus as to the Johannine authorship of Revelation. 39 In light of all this "We cannot

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I cannot think that any other Nominative than *'Αποκάλυψις* can be fairly supplied here." See Macdonald's statement as to Guericke's initial acceptance of the argument followed by his later retraction of his endorsement, *Life and Writings,* p. 169. Robinson, Redating, pp. 221 ff.

34. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:265.

35. Robinson, *Redating,* pp. 221 -222n.

36. *Against Heresies* 2:22:5; 3:3:4.

37. *See* Tertullian, On *the Exclusion of Heretics 36;* cp. Jerome, *Against Jovinianum* 1:26.

38. *Ecclesiastical History* 3:23:3, citing *Against Heresies* 2:22:5.

39. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (7:25: *16)* Eusebius denies what Irenaeus clearly affirms, that the Apostle John wrote Revelation: "But I think that he was *some* other one of those in Asia; as they say that there are two monuments in Ephesus, each bearing the name of John. "

accept a dubious expression of the Bishop of Lyons as adequate to set aside an overwhelming weight of evidence, alike external and internal, in proof of the fact that the Apocalypse was written, at the latest, soon after the death of Nero."[40]

Second, the Latin translation of Irenaeus reads: *quiet Apocalypsin viderat. Neque enim ante multum temporis vi-sum est.* The Latin translator may indeed have understood the Greek phrase as commonly understood. This may explain the *visum est* as opposed to the *visa est.* But it should be remembered that the Latin translation is not Irenaeus's original and thus did not come with his imprimatur. Indeed, renowned Church historian John Laurence von Mosheim — who composed his famous Church history in Latin – spoke quite despairingly of the Latin translation of Irenaeus. He laments that Irenaeus's writings "have reached us merely through the medium of a wretchedly barbarous and obscure Latin translation."[41] Schaff agrees that this translation employs "barbarous Latin. "[42] Stuart calls it "a dead literality."[43] Having remarked on the obscurities of Irenaeus's Greek (see quotation above), the translators of Irenaeus for the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* add that "the Latin version adds to these difficulties of the original, by being itself of the most barbarous character. . . . Its author is unknown, but he was certainly little qualified for his task. "[44]

Not only was the translator inadequate to the task, but he probably had no independent knowledge of the matter apart from what he had learned from his own reading of Irenaeus. Hence, his mistake (if it be one) could be due to the very real ambiguities of the text that have led modern Greek scholars into debate over the translation.

In addition, it may well be that the Latin text is corrupt. The science of textual criticism has an impressive capacity to work back to the original readings of corrupted texts through the application of sound philological and critical principles. Chase suggests that the problem may indeed be one of accidental textual corruption in light of the following intrinsic probabilities: "The translator, especially

40. See Farrar, *Early Days,* p. *408.*

41. John Laurence von Mosheim, *History of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New* York: Converse, 1854) 1:393.

42. Schaff, *History* 1:752n.

43. Stuart, *Apocalypse 2:119.*

44. Roberts and Rambaut,inANFI:311 -*312.*

with *τὴν ἀποκάλυψιν* before him in the Greek text, could not have been ignorant that *Ἀποκάλυψις* is a feminine substantive. Especially when contractions were used, *visus* and *visum* would be easily confused. It appears to me probable that the somewhat strange *visum est* points back to an original *visus est.* The latter words, if they seemed difficult, would easily be corrupted into *visum est.*"[45]

The third problem with the re-interpretation of Irenaeus is explaining how Irenaeus could speak of those who saw John toward the latter end of Domitian's reign in light of the fact that he also tells us John lived into Trajan's reign. In *Against Heresies* Irenaeus writes that John "continued with the Elders till the times of Trajan."[46] Surely Irenaeus would not contradict himself by suggesting in one place that John lived until the end of Domitian's reign, while in another saying that he lived to Trajan's reign.

The problem, however, is not as difficult to overcome as might initially appear. In the first place, Domitian died in A.D. 96 and Trajan became emperor in A.D. 98 (after a very brief reign by Nerva). Swete states of Irenaeus's reference that it speaks of John's "having lived to the time of Trajan, i.e. to the year 98 at least."[47] *Only* two *years separate the reigns.* It is not unreasonable to suppose that almost a century later the two years' difference separating the two emperors could have been blurred by Irenaeus. It must be remembered that dating then was very imprecise because chronicles were not kept by Christians. As Robinson notes regarding problems of chronology during that era: "The sources, Roman, Jewish, and Christian, are largely uncoordinated and share no common canon of chronology such as is supposed by any modern historian."[48]

In the second place, Irenaeus does not say (upon the reconstruction of his argument as per Chase and others) that John *died* at the end of Domitian's reign. He simply says he "was seen" (*ἑωράθη*) at that time, perhaps by those who spoke to him face to face (to whom Irenaeus refers). Possibly there is a contrast of ideas between these two references, a contrast that involves John's advanced age: "Obviously the statement that the Apostle 'was seen at the close of Domi-

45. Chase, "Date", p. 435.

46. *Against Heresies* 2:22:5 and 3:3:4. Both of Irenaeus's statements are quoted in the Greek in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:23:3.

47. Swete, *Revelation,* p. clxxix.

48. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 32.

tian's' reign cannot be considered inconsistent with the statement that 'he continued with the Elders till the times of Trajan.' It may well be that there is an intentional contrast between the phrase *παρέμεινεν αὐτοῖς* and *ἑωράθη*. The former appears to me simply to suggest the idea of survival, the latter (as used by Irenaeus) of free intercourse. In his extreme old age, in 'the times of Trajan,' [if it be well into Trajan's reign, KLG] it can hardly be but that, though he 'continued with' the Church, St John withdrew from the society of the Christians at Ephesus; he was no longer 'seen.' "[49] Such is an entirely reasonable hypothesis.

The Significance of the Time Reference

Not only does the contextual emphasis on personal contact with and knowledge of John provide a clue to the referent of *ἑωράθη*, but also the phraseology as to *when* "John" or "it" was seen. We turn again to Chase, who offers a penetrating insight into this further aspect of the problem:

> On which of the two suppositions is the language of Irenaeus more natural, on the supposition that he is referring to the date of the vision and of the publication of the Book, or on the supposition that he is referring to the time when St John was still alive and still associated with the members of the Church? Now Irenaeus wrote the third book of his great work when Eleutherus was Bishop of Rome (3:3:3), i.e. between 175 A.D. and 190 A. D.; and the fifth book cannot be of an earlier date. Domitian was murdered in 96 A.D. Hence if the Apocalypse was "seen" at "the close of Domitian's reign," nearly a hundred years had elapsed when Irenaeus wrote his fifth book. Is it natural that, in reference to a vision seen and a book composed nearly a hundred years previously, Irenaeus should have used the expression *οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸ πολλοῦ χρόνου ἑωράθη, ἀλλὰ σχεδὸν ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς*? On the other hand, such language is no more than a venial hyperbole if he had in mind the prolongation of St John's life, the internal between whom and himself was spanned by the life of his master, Polycarp of Smyrna. As we learn from the Epistle to Florinus, Irenaeus had a most vivid remembrance of Polycarp as Polycarp had a most vivid remembrance of St John.[50]

This problem is so obvious that even a late date advocate of the

49. Chase, "Date," p. 435.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

calibre of Peake expresses frustration: "The statement of Irenaeus 'it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation,' is difficult, since Irenaeus wrote his great work about A.D. 180-190, nearly a century after the closing of Domitian's reign, and his birth probably at least a quarter of a century later than the death of Domitian."[51]

In addition, the time phrase cannot be pushed too far in this regard for a very important reason: "It should be noted that the words *πρὸς τῷ τέλει τῆς Αομετιανοῦ ἀρχῆς* do not stand in immediate connection with *ἑωράθη*; they are added to explain *ἐπὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας γενεᾶς*. Further, the Greek preposition *πρός* (the use of which with the dative in a temporal sense is very unusual) does not seem to express quite so sharply as the English preposition 'at' the notion ofa point oftime."[52] How can such observations be considered the least unreasonable? The evidence against the usefulness of Irenaeus for late date advocacy continues to mount.

Incompatibility of Irenaeus's Revelation Statements

Another problem with the commonly received translation is with Irenaeus's statement at 5:30:1:

> He states these things in the third book of his above-mentioned work, In the fifth book he speaks as follows concerning the Apocalypse of John, and the number of the name of Antichrist: "As these things are so, and this number is found in all the approved and ancient copies."[53]

Irenaeus's mention of ancient copies of Revelation indicates his awareness of its circulating "at a much earlier time."[54] Irenaeus's statement may be suggestive as to the date of Revelation. Lee comments that such a statement tends to suggest "an early date for the inscripturation of the original master document itself. Clearly, the original autograph must have been still more ancient than even any of the 'most ancient *copies*.' For even the '*most ancient* copies' could only have been made *after* the original autograph. . . . And to the 185 A.D. Irenaeus, the '*most* ancient' copies of all of the various '*ancient copies*' had apparently all been made, well before 'the end of Domitian's

51. Peake, *Revelation*, p. 72 n. 1.
52. Chase, "Date," p. 434.
53. Eusebius Ecclessiastical History 5:8:5-6. Cited from Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 1:222.*
54. Guthrie, Introduction, p. 933.

rule.' "[5] Is it not remarkable that in the same breath Irenaeus can mention "those who have seen John face to face" and "all the good and ancient copies [of Revelation]"? It would seem that the "ancient" (ἀρχαίοις) character of the "copies" (ἀντιγράφοις) would suggest something more ancient than the "end of Domitian's reign," which Irenaeus speaks of as "almost in our own generation."

> It is difficult to see why the A.D. 130ff Irenaeus would have referred (as he did) to "*ancient* copies" (rather than simply to "copies") – *if* the original autograph *had* itself been written *only* "towards the end of Domitian's rule." . . . For then, the first "ancient copies" would and could only have been made *after* A.D. 96 — whereas Irenaeus implies that those ancient copies were made *before* that date! Moreover, even if the copies *concerned* were made only after A.D. 96 – they could hardly have been called "ancient" by the time of Irenaeus (born 130 A.D.). Still less could such first copies then (at a date only after 96 A. D.) appropriately have been described by Irenaeus as "the *most* approved and *ancient* copies." Surely the compilation of *many* copies would thereafter require even further time. And the further determination of such of those approved and ancient copies as Irenaeus refers to as the "*most* approved and ancient copies" of the original, would need a further long time to take place.[56]

If Revelation were written pre-A.D. 70, then its date would be about three decades older still.

The Weight of Irenaeus's Statement

Few early church fathers stand above Irenaeus in importance as an early, reliable witness to ancient Church history. Williston Walker notes that he was "the earliest theological leader of distinction in the rising Catholic Church. "[57] Schaff agrees with Walker's assessment and speaks highly of Irenaeus: "Irenaeus is the leading representative of catholic Christianity in the last quarter of the second century, the champion of orthodoxy against Gnostic heresy, and the mediator between the Eastern and Western churches. He united a learned Greek education and philosophical penetration with practical wis-

55. Francis Nigel Lee, "Revelation and Jerusalem" (Brisbane, Australia by the author, 1985), § 36.

56. *Ibid.*, § 37.

57. Williston Walker, *A History of the* Christian *Church,* 3rd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 62.

dom and moderation. He is neither very original nor brilliant, but eminently sound and judicious. "[58] He is an extremely helpful witness to many matters of historical significance for the understanding of early Church history.

Unfortunately, however, "Second-century traditions about the apostles are demonstrably unreliable."[59] And although generally reliable, Irenaeus's writings are not without imperfection in matters historical. Indeed, some very fine and reputable scholars of renown discount his testimony that is so relevant to our debate. Robinson notes that "despite this [the testimony of Irenaeus to a late date], Hort, together with Lightfoot and Westcott, none of whom can be accused of setting light to ancient tradition, still rejected a Domitianic date in favour of one between the death of Nero in 68 and the fall of Jerusalem in 70. It is indeed a little known fact that this was what. Hort calls 'the general tendency of criticism for most of the nineteenth century,' and Peake cites the remarkable consensus of 'both advanced and conservative scholars' who backed it ."[60] The Oxford University classical historian B. W. Henderson agrees, and adds that

> Irenaeus, the earliest extant authority, dates the [Revelation] under Domitian. His date, however, is c. 180 A. D., and if the Apocalypse enjoyed strange vicissitudes of neglect and esteem immediately after Irenaeus, as with Caius, Hippolytus, and the author of the Muratorian fragment, it not improbably did before, especially when years passed. . . . Irenaeus' testimony to its authorship is perhaps more valuable than to its date. He abandons the task of interpretation in despair and with it the internal evidence which here on the question of date is more valuable than one piece of external evidence, not 'a generation' only later but a century.[61]

Farrar, speaking of Papias's statement regarding the fertility of the vines in the millennium that is recorded by Irenaeus,[62] makes a relevant and noteworthy observation:

> Experience shows that a story told second-hand, even by an honest

58. Schaff, *History* 2:750.

59. G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 4.

60. Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 224-225.

61. Henderson, Nero, p. 442.

62. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:33:3.

> narrator, may be so tinged in the narrator's subjectivity y as to convey an impression positively false. We are thus obliged to discount the tales and remarks for which Irenaeus refers us to the authority of "the Elders," by whom he seems chiefly to mean Papias and Polycarp. Now Eusebius does not hesitate to say that Papias was a source of error to Irenaeus and others who relied on his "antiquity." When Irenaeus says that the "Pastor of Hermas" is canonical; that the head of the Nicolaitans was the Deacon Nicolas; and that the version of the LXX. was written by inspiration; – we know what estimate to put on his appeals to apostolic tradition.[63]

Late date advocate Guthrie admits that Irenaeus is too often uncritical in his evaluation of evidence.[64] Another, and even more vigorous, late date advocate, James Moffatt, observes that "Irenaeus, of course, is no great authority by himself on matters chronological."[65]

If Irenaeus's famous statement is not to be re-interpreted along the lines of the argument as outlined above (although the present writer believes it should), it may still be removed as a hindrance to early date advocacy on the following grounds. These grounds may not be so substantial when considered individually, but when their combined weight is added to the above translational problem, they tend to render Irenaeus's statement of questionable significance.

Irenaeus's Relationship to Polycarp

In the statement regarding John's writing Revelation while banished by Domitian, Irenaeus makes reference to the testimony of those who saw John "face to face." It is a noteworthy fact emphasized by Irenaeus that he met Polycarp, who had known the Apostle John. Indeed, Irenaeus highly cherished the memory of Polycarp, as he mentions in his letter to Florinus:

> For I saw thee when I was yet a child [παῖς ἔτι ὤν], in Lower Asia with Polycarp, and thou wert in stately position in the royal palace and studying to approve thee to him. For I recall rather what happened then than what are more recent (for what we learnt from our very childhood grow on us with our soul and are a part of it) so that I can even tell the place where the blessed Polycarp and I conversed

63. Farrar, *Early Days*, p. 398.
64. Guthrie, *Introduction*, p. 17.
65. Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 320.

> and his goings forth and comings in and the manner of his life and the form of his body and discourses that he used to make to the people, and his intercourse with John how he would tell of it, and that with the rest of those who had seen the Lord, and how he would recount their words: and concerning the Lord what things they were which he had heard from them both as to His mighty works and His Teaching, as Polycarp having received them from the eye-witnesses of the Life of the Word, used to recount them consonantly to the Scriptures. These things did I then too by the mercy of God which was upon me hear diligently, noting them not on paper but in my own heart and ever by the grace of God do I ruminate them aright.[66]

In *Against Heresies* we read Irenaeus saying:

> And Polycarp too, who had not only been trained by the Apostles, and had conversed with many of those who had seen Christ, but also had been constituted by the Apostles, Bishop over Asia, in the Church of Smyrna: – whom we also saw in the first age of our life; for he tarried with us long, and in extreme old age, by a glorious and distinguished martyrdom, departed this life; having always taught these things, which he learned from the Apostles, which the Church delivers, which alone are true.[67]

Quite naturally Irenaeus's connection to Polycarp is of much historical importance and tends to lend even greater weight to Irenaeus's statement. Despite this revered meeting, Irenaeus, it should be noted, claims to have seen Polycarp as a παῖς, a child, in the "first age of our life" (ἐν τῇ προτῇ ἕλικιε). Furthermore, he specifically says that he did not take notes of this meeting. A long period of time – perhaps three-quarters of a century – passed before he wrote his *Against Heresies.* Thus, some of his memories of those who saw John "face to face" (e.g., Polycarp) could have been diminished by both his own youthful immaturity at the time of his meeting with Polycarp and the passage of a great deal of time.

Irenaeus, the Church Fathers, and Historical Matters

For the present purposes, a couple of samples from Eusebius will suffice in illustration of the fact that other Church fathers did not

66. Irenaeus, *Letter to Florinus*, in John Keble, trans., *Five Books of S. Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons Against Heresies* (London: James Parker, 1872).

67. *Against Heresies* 3:3:4.

accept necessarily Irenaeus's authority as conclusive.

Irenaeus states matter-of-factly that Papias was "the hearer of John."[ym] Eusebius, however, provides information that contradicts Irenaeus's claim that Papias had heard John. Eusebius records a statement by Papias that said, "If therefore anyone came who had been a follower of the Presbyters, I would ask him about the words of the Presbyters."[69] According to Eusebius, and contrary to Irenaeus, Papias sought for those who had seen any of the "presbyters" or apostles. Obviously, then, he was not one of them himself.

In other places Eusebius disputes the opinion that Revelation was written by the Apostle John.[70] And this despite the fact Irenaeus (who claims to have known Polycarp, who knew John) was certain that the Apostle wrote it.[71] For some reason, obviously compelling to Eusebius, he felt justified in contradicting Irenaeus's emphatic statements regarding the Johannine authorship of Revelation. Eusebius's countering of Irenaeus's witness in this area surely indicates that this great chronicler of the Church did not conceive of Irenaeus as above reproach on historical matters.

Irenaeus's Historical Errors

In *Against Heresies we* read a very unusual historical statement:

> For how had He disciples, if He did not teach? And how did He teach, if He had not a Master's age? For He came to Baptism as one Who had not yet fulfilled thirty years, but was beginning to be about thirty years old; (for so Luke, who bath signified His years, bath set it down; Now Jesus, when He came to Baptism, began to be about thirty years old:) and He preached for one year only after His Baptism: completing His thirtieth year He suffered, while He was still young, and not yet come to riper age. But the age of 30 years is the first of a young man's mind, and that it reaches even to the fortieth year, everyone will allow: but after the fortieth and fiftieth year, it begins to verge towards elder age: which our Lord was of when He taught, as the Gospel and all the Elders witness, who in Asia conferred with John the Lord's disciple, to the effect that John had delivered these things

68. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5:33:4.
69. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39.
70. *Ibid.*, 3:24:17-18; 5:8:5-7; *7:25:7,8, 14.*
71. *See* Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4142; 4:16:6; 421 :3; 4:28:2; 5:34:2, compare with 4:20:11; 5:26:1.

> unto them: for he abode with them until the times of Trajan. And some of them saw not only John, but others also of the Apostles, and had this same account from them, and witness to the aforesaid relation. Whom ought we rather to believe? These, being such as they are, or Ptolemy, who never beheld the Apostles, nor ever in his dreams attained to any vestige of an Apostle?[72]

The careful detail he meticulously recounts in his argument, and the reference to the eyewitness accounts, should be noted. Yet, no respected New Testament scholar asserts that the biblical record allows for a fifteen year or more ministry for Christ, or of His having attained an age in excess of forty. We must vigorously assert that Irenaeus was "strangely mistaken about the age of Jesus."[73] As Selwyn notes in another connection regarding Irenaeus's *Against Heresies (3:11:8):* "Meanwhile as to Irenaeus, it must be owned that he is inevitably pursued by his own sayings. No man who has written down the statement, that there must be four gasps because there are four winds, can fairly hope to preserve the same reputation as a judge of evidence after it as be fore."[74]

Additional insights into obvious errors could be cited from Irenaeus. But the one cited should demonstrate clearly that he could (he did at least once!) err on matters of historical detail – even when he claimed the authority of eyewitness accounts.

Irenaeus as the Fountain of Tradition

It is surely the case that the external evidence stands as *the* strongest witness for the late dating of Revelation. But caution should forestall our wholehearted endorsement of that witness. Several scholars of note argue that the strong external witness to the late date of Revelation most likely may be traced back to Irenaeus's lone witness. As Terry observes:

> It seems to us that no impartial mind can fail to see that [the external witness] preponderates in favor of the later date. But when we scrutinize the character and extent of this evidence, it seems equally clear that no very great stress can safely be laid upon it. For it all turns

72. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:22:5.

73. Schaff, *History* 2:751.

74. Edward C. Selwyn, *Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 125.

> upon the single testimony of Irenaeus, who wrote according to the best authorities, about 100 years after the death of John. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> One clear and explicit testimony, when not opposed by other evidence, would be allowed by all fair critics to control the argument; but not so when many other considerations tend to weaken it.[75]

It is widely – even if not universally – recognized that Irenaeus's stature in early Church history caused many later Church fathers to depend – sometimes too uncritically – upon his witness alone to conclude many matters. For instance, Guthrie (a late date advocate regarding Revelation) agrees with Streeter's assertion that all Church fathers after Irenaeus simply repeated his view regarding the origin of the Gospel of Matthew.[76] This problem undoubtedly is true in many other connections as well, and is illustrative of our concern.

Regarding Irenaeus's opinion on the banishment of John, the fact of the matter is that he is "the ultimate source in every case" of the early fathers.77 Other scholars of note express a hesitancy on similar grounds to succumb to the drift of external evidence in this regard. T. Randell notes that "the clear and positive external testimony against it is not strong, being reducible (as it seems to us) to the solitary statement of Irenaeus, near the end of the second century, that the Apocalypse was seen towards the close of Domitian's reign. . . . Irenaeus, writing a century after the fact, may easily have made the mistake of putting the name of one famous persecuting emperor instead of the other, and it is remarkable that his statement is supported by no other writer earlier than Victorious of Pettan, after a second interval of a century. Eusebius and Jerome, in the fourth century, do not strengthen what they merely repeat ."[78] Milton Terry agrees: "When we scrutinize the character and extent of this evidence, it seems equally clear that no very great stress can safely be laid upon it. For it all turns upon the single testimony of Irenaeus."[79]

Moses Stuart expresses the same sentiment when he perceptively argues that

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75. Terry, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 237, 239.

76. Guthrie, *Introduction*, p. 29 n.4.

77. C. C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 78.

78. T. Randell, "Revelation," in vol. 22 of *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1950), p. iv.

79. Terry, *Hermeneutics*, p. 237.

> The testimony in respect to the matter before us is evidently *successive* and *dependent,* not coeaneous and independent. . . .[80]
>
> . . . .
>
> If now the *number* of the witnesses were the only thing which should control our judgment in relation to the question proposed, we must, so far as *external* evidence is concerned, yield the palm to those who fix upon the time of Domitian. But a careful examination of this matter shows, that the whole concatenation of witnesses in favour of this position hangs upon the testimony of Irenaeus, and their evidence is little more than a mere repetition of what he has said. Eusebius and Jerome most plainly depend on him; and others seem to have had in view his authority, or else that of Eusebius.[81]

Barclay Newman writes that the fact that later witnesses almost certainly derive from him makes him "of minimal and negative value for determining the original context of the Apocalypse."[82]

This problem is especially disturbing when it is allowed to overshadow a book's own self-witness to its date for "the internal witness of any writing which is not suppositions, must always outweigh testimony of such a nature, provided such evidence is sufficiently plain and ample. . . . What book in the New Testament has as many diagnostic passages in respect to time as this [i.e. Revelation]?"[83]

Conclusion

In closing it should be noted that there are several other possible reasons for Irenaeus's error, if it be such. (1) Irenaeus could have had information that related to Domitian's brief reign for Vespasian in A.D. 70 when he had "full consular authority — *imperio consulari.*"[84] Tacitus states in his Histories that before Vespasian came to Rome to assume power "Caesar Domitian received the praetorship. His name was prefixed to epistles and edicts."[85] Irenaeus could have confounded this evidence with Domitian's later reign as emperor. (2)

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80. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:282.

81. *Ibid.* 2:269.

82. B. Newman, "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1962-63):138.

83. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:281.

84. Edmundson, *Church in Rome,* p. 170. See also Simcox, *Revelation,* p. xl.

85. Tacitus, *Histories* 4:39.

John could have suffered twice, under both Nero and Domitian. This certainly could account for Irenaeus's confusion. (3) Also it should be remembered that Irenaeus was at Lyons when he wrote – quite far away from ecclesiastical tradition. Stuart comments in this regard: "I say this, with full recognition of the weight and value of Irenaeus's testimony, as to any matters of fact with which he was acquainted, or as to the common tradition of the churches. But in view of what Origen has said. . . , how can we well suppose, that the opinion of Irenaeus, as recorded in *Cont. Haeres.* V. *30* was formed in any other way, than by his own interpretation of Rev. 1:9. "[86]

A careful scrutiny of the Irenaean evidence for a late date for Revelation tends to render any confident employment of him suspect. The difficulties with Irenaeus in this matter are many and varied, whether or not his witness is accepted as credible. A bold "thus saith Irenaeus," cannot be conclusive of the matter.

86. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:281.

5

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Titus Flavius Clemens (c. A.D. 150-215) was a presbyter in the church of Alexandria from about A.D. 189 until his death. He possessed an eclectic richness of information derived from broad reading, and he is known as the father of Alexandria Christian philosophy. [1] Clement of Alexandria almost universally is cited by late date advocates as supportive of their view.[2]

The statement from Clement that is deemed useful is found in his *Quis Salvus Dives* (i.e., *Who is the Rich Man that shall be Saved?*), Section 42.

> And to give you confidence, when you have thus truly repented, that there remains for you a trustworthy hope of salvation, hear a story that is no mere story, but a true account of John the apostle that has been handed down and preserved in memory. When after the death of the tyrant he removed from the island of' Patmos to Ephesus, he used to journey by request to the neighboring districts of the Gentiles, in some places to appoint bishops, in others to regulate whole churches, in others to set among the clergy some one man, it may be, of those indicated by the Spirit.[3]

The critical phrase here is "after the death of the tyrant he removed from the island of Patmos to Ephesus." The Greek of that phrase is:

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1. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 2:783.

2. See for example, R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), pp. xcii-xciii; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. xcix; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970) , pp. 956-957.

3. G. W. Butterworth, *Clement of Alexandria* (London: Heinemann, 1919), pp. 356ff.

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ τοῦ τυρά WOV τελευτήσαντος ἀπὸ τῆς Πάτμου τῆς νήσου μετῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὴν Ἔφεσον.

Despite widespread employment of Clement's statement in the debate, a close consideration of the comment lessens its usefulness as evidence for the late date of Revelation. Furthermore, some quite logical considerations actually tilt the evidence from Clement in an early date direction, despite Clement's presumed role as a leading late date witness.

Identifying the "Tyrant"

It should be painfully obvious upon even a cursory reading of the text that the required name, "Domitian," is not once mentioned in this piece of evidence – an evidence that Swete[4] calls one of "the chief authorities"! John is said to return from Patmos after the death of "the tyrant." But who was this "tyrant"? May we cite Clement of Alexander's nebulous statement as evidence for a late date with any credible degree of certainty or conviction? It is true that "the absence of a name in both Clement and Origen certainly does not prove that no name was known to them. But the coincidence is curious, and on the whole suggests that the Alexandria tradition assigned the stay in Patmos to banishment by an emperor, but did not name the emperor."5

As a matter of fact, *Nero* above all other emperors best meets up to the qualification of "tyrant" for several reasons:

The Universal Fear of Nero

First, even outside Christian circles Nero's infamous evil was greatly feared. Pliny the Elder (a contemporary of Nero who died in the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79) described Nero as "the destroyer of the human race," "the poison of the world."[6] A full quotation from Pliny is here given:

> Marcus Agrippa is said to have been born in this manner [i.e., breech position], almost the solitary instance of a successful career among all those so born – although he too is deemed to have paid the penalty

4. Swete, *Revelation*, p. xcix.

5. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xv.

6. Pliny, *Natural History* 7:45; 22:92, trans. found in Miriam T. Griffin, *Nero: The End ofa Dynasty* (New Haven: Yale, 1984), p. 15.

> which his irregular birth foretold, by a youth made unhappy by lameness, a lifetime passed amidst warfare and ever exposed to the approach of death, by the misfortune caused to the world by his whole progeny but especially due to his two daughters who became the mothers of the emperors Gaius Caligula and Domitius Nero, the two firebrands of mankind. . . . Nero also, who was emperor shortly before and whose entire rule showed him the enemy of mankind.[7]

Apollonius of Tyana (b. 4 B.C.) says that Nero was "commonly called a Tyrant": "In my travels, which have been wider than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen many, many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs. . . . And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mothers, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet."8

Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 56-117) spoke of Nero's "cruel nature"[9] that "put to death so many innocent men." [10] He records a senate speech that discussed the wrongs of Tiberius and Gaius, noting that "Nero arose more implacable and more cruel" and that the senate under Nero "had been cut down." [11] Suetonius (A.D. 70-130) speaks of Nero's "cruelty of disposition" evidencing itself at an early age.[12] He documents Nero's evil and states: "Neither discrimination nor moderation [were employed] in putting to death whomsoever he pleased on any pretext whatever." [13] Juvenal (c. A.D. 60- 138) speaks of "Nero's cruel and bloody tyranny." [14] He laments Nero's heinous sexual exploits with handsome young men: "No misshapen youth was ever unsexed by cruel tyrant in his castle; never did Nero have a bandy-legged or scrofulous favourite, or one that was hump-backed or pot-bellied!" [15]

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7. Pliny, Natural *History* 7:45.

8. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius 438. Cited* in John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 235, from J. S. Phillimore (Oxford, 1912) 2:38.

9. Tacitus, *Histories* 4:8.

10. *Ibid.* 4:7.

11. *Ibid. 442.*

12. Suetonius, Nero 7:1.

13. *Ibid.* 37:1.

14. Juvenal, *Satires* 7:225.

15. *Satires* 10:306ff.

In the Syriac *The History of John the Son of Zebedee* Nero is called "the unclean and impure and wicked king." [16] Nero's notoriety was long remembered, and with peculiar loathing. Surely this is why Clement could write merely "the tyrant" when he made reference to the emperor of the banishment!

Furthermore, Nero was widely suspected of intentionally starting the fire (which began on July 19, A.D. 64) that caused the horribly destructive burning of Rome. Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23-79), Suetonius,[17] the writer of the *Octavia (c.* A.D. 75), and Dio Cassius (A.D. 150-235)'8 allege his culpability in this regard. And Tacitus indicates the allegations were contemporary with the fire. [19]

Among the ancient pagan written traditions exhibiting a hatred and mockery of Nero are: *The Octavia,*[20] Suetonius,[21] Pliny the Younger (A.D. 62-113),22 Juvenal,[23] Martial (c. A.D. 38-85),[24] Statius (A.D. 40-96) ,[25] Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 120-180),26 Aulus Persius Flaccus (A.D. 34-62), 27 Vulcacius (First Century), 28 Epictetus (A.D. 60-140) ,[29] Marcus Annaeus Lucan (A.D. 39-95),30 and Herodian (A.D. 165-235) .[31] A poetic epigram by Martial, written in the reign of

16. William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, *vol.* 1 (Amsterdam: Philo, [1871] 1968), p. 55.

17. Suetonius, Nero 38:1ff.

18. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 72: 16:1ff.

19. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:39. *See* discussion of these references in Griffin, Nero, pp. 132ff.

20. Miriam T. Griffin analyzes the presentation of Nero in *The Octavia* thus: "Nero is, in fact, the proverbial tyrant, robbed of any personal characteristics, a mere incarnation of the will to evil, unaffected by advice or influence" (Griffin, Nero, p. 100).

21. Suetonius, *Domitian 14.*

22. Pliny, *Panegyricus 53.*

23. Juvenal, Satires 438.

24. Martial *Epigrams 7:21, 21:33.* Marcus Valerius Martialis was "the greatest of epigrammatists, and the father of the epigram as we understand it" (Walter C. Kerr, trans., *Martial: Epigrams,* Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1967] 1 :vii). Martial wrote: 'This is that day which, conscious of a great birth, gave Lucan to the nations, and Polls, to thee. Ah, Nero! cruel, and for no death more hateful! this deed at least should not have been permitted thee!"

25. Statius, *Silvae* 2:7.

26. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations 3:16.*

27. Preserved in Suetonius's On *Poets – Aulus Persius Flaccus.*

28. Persius Flaccus, *Life of Cassius* 8:4, and *Capitolinus 28:10.*

29. Epictetus 45:17.

30. Preserved in Suetonius's On *Poets – Lucan.*

31. Herodian, 1:3:4 and *Historia Augusta* at *Marcus 28:10, Avidius Cassius* 8:4, and *Commodus* 18.

Titus, disparages Nero and extols Titus:

> Here where the heavenly COLOSSUS has a close view of the stars
> And high structures rise on the lofty road
> There once shone the hated hall of the cruel king
> And one house took up the whole of Rome.
> Here where rises the huge mass of the awesome amphitheatre
> In sight of all was Nero's pool.
> A proud park deprived the poor of their houses.
> Where the Claudian temple spreads its wide shade
> Stood the last part of the palace.
> Rome is returned to herself and under your rule, Caesar,
> The delights of their master have become those of the people.[32]

Thus, biblical scholar Merrill C. Tenney speaks scathingly of the notorious evil of Nero: "Having exhausted the imperial treasury by his heedless expenditures, he looked for some method of replenishing it. Heavy taxation of the estates of childless couples, false accusations followed by confiscation of wealth, and outright murder of the aristocracy or else invitation to suicide made life unbearable. Wealthy men lived in dread of the emperor's displeasure, and so great was the terror that the senatorial class endured unimaginable insults and mistreatment as the price of staying alive. Men betrayed their best friends, perjured themselves, and stooped to any infamy to aver the emperor's hatred or cupidity."[33] Historian B. W. Henderson writes in a similar vein, and adds regarding Nero's memory:

> And now [i.e., in Vespasian's reign] begins that systematic disparagement of Nero which consciously or unconsciously colours the whole of our extant records, as has been already explained. The farther, too, that the traveller recedes the darker looks the air behind him, and the historic mist has at once such obscuring and such magnifying power that the writers of the Flavian age devoted little care to recovering the true outlines of Nero's portrait, or considering the great background

32. Martial, *Book of Spectacles 2.*
33. Men-ill C. Tenney, New *Testament Times* (Chicago: Moody, 1965, p. 289).

> which lay behind his personal character and misdeeds. The dismal and prosaic tragedy called the "Octavia," written in the early part of Vespasian's Principate, lacks all poetic merit, and has in solitary compensation one historic interest, revealing to us how quickly Nero's character could be stereotyped as that of the blackest of all villains under the dynasty which had replaced the Julian. Otherwise the journalist of a law court could write a more moving tragedy. Martial and Statius the poets hurl at Nero's head their choicest and most abusive epithets. Domitian could in later years be loaded with no greater reproach than that of being a second Nero, a "bald-headed Nero." . . . Marcus Aurelius used him as did Epictetus earlier, as type of the evil character. "To be violently drawn and moved by the lusts and desires of the soul," said the philosopher King, "is proper to wild beasts and monsters, such as Phalaris and Nero were." And the inferior scribblers of later generations who wrote the Emperors' lives inscribed on a permanent black-list the names of six Emperors — Caligula, Vitellius, Domitian, Commodus, Heliogabalus, and, always, Nero.[34]

Nero scholar Miriam T. Griffin speaks of Nero's tyrannical behavior thus:

> Commenting on the unanimity of opinion about the Emperor Nero that prevails among the ancient authorities, the historian Charles Merivale wrote, 'With some allowance only for extravagance of colouring, we must accept in the main the verisimilitude of the picture they have left us of this arch-tyrant, the last and the most detestable of the Caesarean family. . . . Nero was the first Princeps to be declared a public enemy by the Senate. . . .[35]
>
> . . . .
>
> In European literature Nero has served as the stock example of unnatural cruelty, a matricide in Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* a fratricide in Racine's *Britannicus.* The hero of the Marquis de Sade, he has fascinated decadent writers as the *incredibilium cupitor* longing to overcome human limits through extremes of luxury, cruelty and depravity. . . . Certainly no serious historian has been tempted to whitewash the tyrant.[36]

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34. B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 418-419.

35. Griffin, *Nero,* p. 15.

36. *Ibid.,* p. 16. The statement that no modem historian "has been tempted to

The Fear of Nero's Return

Second, Nero was so dreaded by many that after his death there began circulating haunting rumors of his destructive return. In fact, "very soon after Nero's death, there grew up a curious legend which remains well-nigh unique in history, the legend that Nero would return to earth again to reign. "37 The rumors can be found in the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Zonara, Dion Chrysostom, Augustine, and other ancient writers.[38]

In the corpus of the Sibylline Oracles Nero appears as a constant threat to the world. Sibylline scholar J. J. Collins notes in this regard that "there is the prominence of Nero as an eschatological adversary throughout the Sibylline corpus."39 Let us take a few pages to demonstrate the pervasiveness of Nero in these alleged prophecies of folklore quality. In the Jewish Sibylline Oracles (written "sometime after A.D. 70")[40] there is a veiled reference to Nero[41] that equates him with the dreaded Beliar:

> Then Beliar will come from the *Sebastenoi* [i.e., the line of Augustus]
> and he will raise up the height of mountains, he will raise up the sea,
> the great fiery sun and shining moon,
> and he will raise up the dead. . . .
> But he will, indeed, also lead men astray, and he will lead astray
> many faithful, chosen Hebrews, and also other lawless
> men who have not yet listened to the word of God.[42]

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whitewash the tyrant" is not exactly true. Arthur Weigall in his classic study, Nero: *Emperor of Rome* (London: Butterworth, 1933) portrays Nero as a victim of bad publicity.

37. Henderson, Nero, p. 419.

38. Tacitus, *Histories* 1:78; 2:8; Suetonius, Nero 57; Dio Cassius *Xiphilinus* 65:9; Zonara, *Annals* 11:15-18; Dio Chrysostom, *Orations* 21:9,10; Augustine, *The City of Goa'* 20:19-3. See also Sibylline Oracles, 4:119-124, 137-139; 5:33ff., 104-107, 139-154, 214-220, 361-370; *Ascension of* Isaiah 42-4.

39. J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," in James H. Charlesworth, cd., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:360.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 363, note j.

42. *Sibylline* Oracles 3:63-70; *OTP* 1:363.

Another passage found in Sibylline Oracles 4:115-124 teaches that Nero had fled Rome to Parthia, from whence he would come to terrify Rome.

Two impostors claiming to be Nero are mentioned in profane history, one, in A.D. 69 and the other twenty years later.[43] Their attempts to deceive and to gain power required the pervasive belief in Nero's being alive and in hiding.

Book 5 of the Sibylline Oracles is also a Jewish composition, written for the most part sometime after A.D. 80.[44] In this book "the evil of Nero has the same three dimensions as the evil of Rome: he is morally evil, he was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem, since the Jewish war began in his reign, and he claimed to be God. "[45] There we read:

> One who has fifty as an initial will be commander,
> a terrible snake, breathing out grievous war, who one day will lay hands
> on his own family and slay them, and throw everything into confusion,
> athlete, charioteer, murderer, one who dares ten thousand things.
> He will also cut the mountain between two seas and defile it with gore.
> But even when he disappears he will be destructive. Then he will return
> declaring himself equal to God. But he will prove that he is not.
> Three princes after him will perish at each other's hands.[46]

Later in the same book Nero's return from Persia is envisioned.[47] He is called

> a savage-minded man, much-bloodied, raving non-

43. Tacitus, *Histories* 2:8,9; Dio Cassius, *Rom History 649;* Suetonius, Nero 57.
44. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:390.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Sibylline Oracles 5:28-35; *OTP 1:393.*
47. Sibylline Oracles 5:93-110. See Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:395, notes y and b2.

sense,
with a full host numerous as sand, to bring destruction on you.[48]

Nero's "flight to the East" is recorded, and he is called

a terrible and shameless prince
whom all mortals and noble men despise.
For he destroyed many men and laid hands on the womb.[49]

His return is prophesied, and he is called "the impious king."[50] Later in Book 5 the return of Nero is to be terribly dreaded:

There will come to pass in the last time about the waning of the moon
a war which will throw the world into confusion and be deceptive in guile.
A man who is a matricide will come from the ends of the earth
in flight and devising penetrating schemes in his mind.
He will destroy every land and conquer all
and consider all things more wisely than all men.
He will immediately seize the one because of whom he himself perished.
He will destroy many men and great rulers,
and he will set fire to all men as no one else ever did.
Through zeal he will raise up those who were crouched in fear.
There will come upon men a great war from the West.
Blood will flow up to the band of deep-eddying rivers.
Wrath will drip in the plains of Macedonia,
an alliance to the people from the West, but destruction for the king.[51]

48. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:96; *OTP 1:395.*
49. *Sibylline* Oracles 5:143- 145; *OTP* 1:396.
50. *Sibylline* Oracles 5:224; *OTP* 1:398.
51. *Sibylline* Oracles 5:361-374; *OTP 1:401-402.*

Book 8 of the Sibylline Oracles was probably written by a Jew sometime before A.D. 180 and during the reign of Marcus Aurelius,[52] over a century after Nero's death. Yet the Nero *Redivivus* myth is still held, as is evidenced in 8:50-72, 139-159, 169-216. At 8:157 he is called "the great beast," and at 8:176 he is called "the former wretched lord."

Sibylline Oracles, Book 12, apparently was written around A.D. 235 by a Jew.[53] Interestingly, in Book 12 "the Sibyl gives negative accounts of emperors who were widely unpopular — Caligula (vss. 50-67), Nero (vss. 78-94), Nerva (vss. 142-46), Commodus (vss. 206-28), Septimus Severus (vss. 256-68). The general attitude to the emperors, however, is favorable. Praise is lavished on Augustus (vss. 12-35), Domitian (vss. 124-38), Hadrian (vss. 163-75), and Marcus Aurelius (vss. 187-205) ."[54] In this book Nero is called "terrible and frightful," "a terrible snake," one engaged in "making himself equal to God."[55]

Collins notes of the Jewish Sibylline Oracles, Book 13, that its date of A.D. 265 is witness to the decline of the Nero legend. Instead of actually expecting Nero himself, a traitor modeled after the Nero legend will come.[56] It took two centuries for the Nero legend to begin its decline, so dreadful an impact did Nero make on history. In 8:70-90 he is envisioned as arising from the dead to destroy Rome and the world.

Nero, the First Imperial Persecutor

Third, for Christians he was especially a dreadful emperor.[57] The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of his persecution, which was not only the first, but one of the cruelest in Rome's gory history, that Nero "inflicted unheard-of punishments on those who, detested for their abominable crimes, were vulgarly called Christians. . . . So those who first confessed were hurried to the trial, and then, on their

52. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:415-416.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. *443-444.*
54. Ibid., p. 443.
55. *Sibylline Oracles* 12:79, *81, 86; OTP* 14-47.
56. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:453.
57. For more information on the persecution under Nero, see Chaps 12 and 17 below.

showing, an immense number were involved in the same fate."[58] Clement of Rome (first century) speaks of Nero's persecution as one that claimed "a vast multitude of the elect . . . through many indignities and tortures."[59]

The mid-second century Christian pseudepigraphic work Ascension of Isaiah "foretells" Beliar's reign (i.e. Nero) :[60] "Beliar . . . shall descend . . . in the form of a man, a lawless king, a slayer of his mother, who . . . will persecute the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved have planted. . . . He will act and speak in the name of the Beloved and say 'I am God and before me there has been none else.' And all the people in the world will believe in him, and will sacrifice to him."[61]

Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) heaps disdain upon Nero: "Consult your histories. There you will find that Nero was the first to rage with the imperial sword against this school in the very hour of its rise in Rome. But we glory – nothing less than glory – to have had such a man to inaugurate our condemnation. One who knows Nero can understand that, unless a thing were good — and very good — it was not condemned by Nero."[62] Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) echoes this hatred of Nero:

> When the rule of Nero was now gathering strength for unholy objects he began to take up arms against the worship of the God of the universe. It is not part of the present work to describe his depravity: many indeed have related his story in accurate narrative, and from them he who wishes can study the perversity of his degenerate madness, which made him compass the unreasonable destruction of so many thousands, until he reached that final guilt of sparing neither his nearest nor dearest, so that in various ways he did to death alike his mother, brothers, and wife, with thousands of others attached to his family, as though they were enemies and foes. But with all this there was still lacking to him this – that it should be attributed to him

58. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

59. *I Clement* 6:1.

60. Beliar here is almost universally recognized to be Nero. See J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation.* Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), p. 218; and George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longman's, Green, 1913), p. 48.

61. *Ascension of Isaiah* 4:1ff.

62. Tertullian, *Apology* 5:3.

that he was the first of the emperors to be pointed at as a foe of divine religion.[63]

Lactantius (c. A.D. 260-330) speaks of Nero's demise after his persecution of Peter and Paul. Interestingly, he observes that Nero was a tyrant: "He it was who first persecuted the servants of God; he crucified Peter, and slew Paul: nor did he escape with impunity; for God looked on the affliction of His people; and therefore this tyrant, bereaved of authority, and precipitated from the height of empire, suddenly disappeared."[64]

Sulpicius Severus (A.D. 360-420) writes:

> As to Nero, I shall not say that he was the worst of kings, but that he was worthily held the basest of all men, and even of wild beasts. It was he who first began a persecution; and I am not sure but he will be the last also to carry it on, if, indeed, we admit, as many are inclined to believe, that he will yet appear immediately before the coming of Antichrist. . . . I content myself with the remark, that he showed himself in every way most abominable and cruel. . . . He first attempted to abolish the name of Christian, in accordance with the fact that vices are always inimical to virtues, and that all good men are ever regarded by the wicked as casting reproach upon them.[65]

In chapter 28 of the same work he continues by noting of Nero's hideous persecution that "in this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians." He even associates Nero with the prophecy of Revelation: "It was accordingly believed that, even if he did put an end to himself with a sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him, – 'And his mortal wound was healed,' [Rev. 13:3] – to be sent forth again near the end of the world, in order that he may practice the mystery of iniquity."[66] Writing of St. Martin of Tours, Severus states that "when we questioned him concerning the end of the world, he said to us that Nero and Antichrist have first to come."[67] In this *Sacred History* he reserves two chapters to a consideration of Nero's reign, and only three sentences to Domitian's.

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63. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25:1-3.

64. *On the Death of the Persecutors* 2.

65. Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2:28.

66. *Sacred History* 2:31. Although he asserts that John wrote Revelation under Domitian.

67. Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues* 14.

Writing of St. Martin elsewhere, Severus extols his sainted life by noting that even though he did not suffer martyrdom, he would gladly have done so. He then chooses two of the worst persecutors of the Church to exalt Martin's willingness: "But if he had been permitted, in the times of Nero and of Decius, to take part in the struggle which then went on, I take to witness the God of heaven and earth that he would freely have submitted."[68]

The apocryphal *Acts of John the Son of Zebedee* follows in the tradition of hatred and loathing of Nero. It speaks of Nero as "the unclean and impure and wicked king."[69]

From such evidence many modern historians feel the terror and dread among the early Christians.

> Foremost in the rank of those emperors, on whom the church looks back with horror as her persecutors, stands Nero, a prince whose conduct towards the Christians admits of no palliation, but was to the last degree unprincipled and inhuman. The dreadful persecution which took place by order of this tyrant, commenced at Rome about the middle of November, in the year of our Lord 64. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> This dreadful persecution ceased but with the death of Nero. The empire, it is well known, was not delivered from the tyranny of this monster until the year 68, when he put an end to his own life.[70]

Nero was especially feared by Christians (of whom Clement of Alexandria was one!):

> An early Church tradition identified St Paul's "man of sin" and 'son of perdition" and "mystery of iniquity" with the Emperor Nero; and of St Augustine's contemporaries some believed that he was still alive in the vigour of his age, others that he would rise again and come as Antichrist. Lactantius, St Chrysostom, St Jerome, and other Christian writers accept and repeat the theory that Nero is the Antichrist to come. The horrors of the first martyrdoms combined with the Nero-legend to produce the Christian tradition, and I doubt if the belief is any more dead today than in the eleventh century, though it cannot

68. Sulpicius Severus, *Letters* 3 (To Deacon Aurelius).
69. See Hort, *Apocalypse,* p. xix.
70. John Laurence von Mosheim, *History of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New* York: Converse, 1854) 1:138, 139.

> now as then obtain a Pope's sanction. Nero, after Judas, becomes the most accursed of the human race. "The first persecutor of the Church must needs be the last, reserved by God for a final and a more awful vengeance."[71]

Truly, "the picture of him as the incarnation of evil triumphed as Christianity triumphed."[72] The references to the Nero-Antichrist designation can be found in the following: the Sibylline Oracles, Tertullian, Lactantius, Jerome, Augustine, and Sulpicius Severus.[73]

The First Century Persecutions

Fourth, the persecution of Christians under Domitian (if we may call it a persecution) was much less severe than that under Nero — although it certainly was a tyrannical outburst.[74] Lightfoot speaks of the Neronic persecution in comparison to the Domitianic thus: "the earlier and more severe assault on the Christians [occurred] in the latter years of the reign of Nero."[75] In fact, "early evidence is lacking for any general religious persecution during Domitian's reign. Though the emperor was a violent man, his violence was directed not against Christians or any other group but against carefully selected individuals whom he suspected of undermining his authority."[76] As Edmundson puts it, Domitian's persecution was "not a general persecution at all, but a series of isolated acts directed chiefly against a few influential persons, including members of his own family."[77] Hort speaks of the Domitianic persecution in contrast to the Neronic by noting that the dramatic language of Revelation "does not fit the short local reign of terror under Domitian. Nero affected the imagination of the world as Domitian, as far as we know, never did."[78] Late date advocate G. E. Ladd states that "there is no evidence that during

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71. Henderson, *Nero*, pp. 420-421.

72. Griffin, Nero, p. 15.

73. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:33; 8:71; Tertullian, *Apologia* 5:4; Lactantius, *The Deaths of the Persecutors 2;* Jerome, *Daniel* (at Daniel 11:28), and *Dialogues 21:+* Augustine, *The City of God* 20:19; and Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2:28, 29.

74. The evidence supportive of this will be examined more fully in Chap. 17.

75. Joseph B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1984), p. 3.

76. Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks (New* York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 368.

77. Edmundson, *Church in Rome*, p. 168.

78. Hort, *Apocalypse*, *xxvi.*

the last decade of the first century there occurred any open and systematic persecution of the church."[79]

Significantly, Domitian's "persecution" warranted his being called a "Nero" by many, Christian and non-Christian alike. The Roman satirist Juvenal, says Domitian was regarded by the Roman aristocracy as a "bald Nero."[80] Martial even refers to Domitian's death as "Nero's death."[81] Tertullian speaks of Domitian in terms of Nero: to Tertullian he was not only "somewhat of a Nero in cruelty,"[82] but a "*sub-Nero*."[83] That he was known as a "Nero," indicates Nero-% *name was paradigmatic of anti-Christian evil, not Domitian's.*

Tertullian (virtually a contemporary with Clement of Alexandria) also notes in his *Scorpiace* that "Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith. "[84] Elsewhere he speaks of Domitian much more favorably than of Nero, thus evidencing the especial early Christian hatred of Nero's tyranny: "Consult your Annals: there ye will find that Nero was the first to wreak the fury of the sword of the Caesars upon this sect, now springing up especially at Rome. But in such a first founder of our condemnation we even glory. For whoever knoweth him, can understand that nothing save some great good was condemned by Nero. Domitian too, who was somewhat of a Nero in cruelty, had tried it, but forasmuch as he was also a human being, he speedily stopped the undertaking, even restoring those whom he had banished."[85] Indeed, he mentions only *Nero's* persecution when citing the persecution of the Apostles who were the foundation of the Church (Eph. 2:19ff) – and was not John one of the Apostles?

Christian apologist Paulus Orosius (c. A.D. 385-418) writes in this regard: "For [Nero] was the first at Rome to torture and inflict the penalty of death upon Christians, and he ordered them throughout all the provinces to be afflicted with like persecution; and in his attempt to wipe out the very name, he killed the most blessed apostles

79. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the* Revelation *of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 8.

80. Juvenal, Satires 4:37ff.

81. Martial, *Epigram* 11:33.

82. *Apology* 5.

83. On the *Mantle 4.*

84. Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting 15.

85. Tertullian, *Apology* 5, in C. Dodgson, trans., *Tertullian,* vol. 1 of *Apologetic and Practical Treatises,* in *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1842).

of Christ, Peter and Paul. "[86]

The later convictions of Moses Stuart should be that of the careful patristics scholar. Stuart originally accepted the late date "evidence" from Clement, but upon later reflection denied it: "In citing the testimony of Clement of Alexandria . . . , I have conceded that Clement probably meant *Domitian*, when he speaks of the tyrant (τυράννου) as dying, and of John's subsequent return to Ephesus. I now doubt whether this was his meaning."[87] In light of the above wealth of evidence, it would seem that the better part of wisdom would opt for the Neronic referent for Clement's nebulous "tyrant."

The Contextual **Difficulty**

A further matter compounds the problem for late date employment of Clement. The context following the critical statement cited above is more easily believable if John were about twenty-five years younger than the age required in the late date view. In connection with his returning from banishment under the "tyrant," Clement informs us of John's activities — activities incredible if by a nonagenarian, or possibly even a centenarian. Let us cite the passage again: "When after the death of the tyrant he removed from the island of Patmos to Ephesus, he used to journey by request to the neighboring districts of the Gentiles, in some places to appoint bishops, in others to regulate whole churches, in others to set among the clergy some one man, it may be, of those indicated by the Spirit. "[88]

In illustration of his activities, Clement immediately adds to the account a story in which John, disturbed by a young church leader's forsaking of the faith, chased him on horseback "with all his might." Clement records the matter thus: "but when he recognised John as he advanced, he turned, ashamed, to flight. The other followed with all his might, forgetting his age, crying, 'Why, my son, dost thou flee from me, thy father, unarmed, old? Son pity me.' "[89] All of this is quite strenuous missionary activity for a man in his 90s![90] And the

86. Paulus Orosius, *The Sewn Books of History Against the Pagans,* book 7, chap. 7, trans. P. J. Deferrari; in *The Fathers oft/u Church, vol. 50* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), pp. 298-299.

87. Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, 2* vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1 :283 -284n.

88. Clement of Alexandria, Who *Is the Rich Mars that Shall be Saved? 42,*

89. Ibid.

90. Farrar noted: "If he lived till the reign of Trajan (Iren. *c. Haer.* ii. *225;* Jer. *de Virr.*

fact that he is said to have forgotten his age does not indicate he may have been ninety, for Paul calls himself "the aged" while nowhere near that old (Phile. 9). The whole episode is much more believable if speaking of a man much younger than in his 90s.

If the story does speak of Domitian's era, it borders on the incredible. If it does not (and it certainly does not mention Domitian), then, in terms of geriatric experience, the whole context is easily to be believed. Indeed, on this basis Ratton affirms that Clement is "a firm believer in the Neronian date of the Book" because of his detailed stories ofJohn's strenuous mission activity and his nebulous reference to "the tyrant. "[91]

The Cessation of Revelation

Despite the late date advocates' assured convictions as to Clement's evidence for a Domitianic date for John's banishment, the above arguments call for a pause and reconsideration. Furthermore, a careful consideration of the implications of the statement of Clement now to be given should totally reverse the usefulness of Clement in our debate, if the above failed that purpose.

In Clement's *Miscellanies* a statement is made that clearly turns the usefulness of Clement toward early date advocacy. In Book 7 of this work Clement deals with the perversion of truth by heretics he calls "Mystagogues of the souls of the impious. " Their error is: "They do not make a right but a perverse use of the divine words. " He then states that apostolic revelation has ceased: "For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius. And that of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, *ends with Nero.* "9[2] It is patently clear in the very text originally under question (Who *is the Rich Man? 42),* as well as in other places *(Miscellanies* 6:13), that Clement. considers the Apostle John as the author of Revelation. And

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Illustr. ix. adu. Jovin. i. *14)* he must have been nearly ninety-eight. The *Chronicon Paschale* says he lived one hundred years and seven months, and pseudo-Chsysostom (de S *Johan.*) that he lived to one hundred and twenty; as also Suidas s. *v. Ioannes*, and Dorotheus (Lampe, p. 92)" (Frederick W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity [New* York Cassell, *1884],* p. 403n).

91. J. L. Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1912), p. 27.

92. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies 7:17.*

here at *Miscellanies 7:17* it is equally plain that he also holds that all revelation given through the apostles ceased under Nero. How could he have made this statement if John's Revelation had been written about 25 years *after* Nero?

Conclusion

When all the Clementine evidence is considered together, it is evident that Clement can be discounted as a late date witness: (1) The reference employed in the argument is vague, at best (it does not mention Domitian). (2) It demands an incredible situation (a ninety year old John riding a horse at full gallop). (3) It would contradict a clear assertion by Clement that all revelation ceased under Nero. Not only so, but Clement even serves as a positive external witness to the early date composition of Revelation (in that Clement holds to the Johannine authorship of Revelation, while declaring that all revelation ceased under Nero).

And this from a father not far removed in time from Irenaeus – and one much closer to the region where John labored. Of Clement's statement regarding "the tyrant" we must concur with Weiss: "Clement is naturally as ignorant of the name of the τυράννος as Origen; but he is undoubtedly in favour of Nero rather than Domitian."[93]

93. Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. A. J. K. Davidson, vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889), p. 51.

6

ADDITIONAL EXTERNAL WITNESSES

The Shepherd of Hermas

The work known as The Shepherd, or The Shepherd of Hermas, *may* be indirectly suggestive of an early date for Revelation. The Shepherd consists of three parts: (1) *Visions*, (2) *Mandates*, and (3) *Similitudes*. Although its value in advancing the early date of Revelation cannot be presented as conclusive, nevertheless, it possesses a certain utility due to certain suggestive possibilities. Such caution is demanded in light of both the nature of its usefulness (as indirect, circumstantial evidence) and the difficulty of its dating.

The Date of The Shepherd

The indeterminate status of the dating of The Shepherd is directly related to the problem of ascertaining its authorship. Lightfoot's analysis of the matter will guide our thinking.[1] Was it written by (1) the Hermas greeted by Paul in Remans 16:14, as Origen suggests? Or by (2) the brother of Pius I (c. A.D. 140-150), as the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 180) teaches? Or by (3) some unknown Hermas who lived in the time of the bishopric of Clement of Rome (A.D. 90-100), as Zahn, Caspari, and others argue?

Unfortunately, an assured conclusion on the date of The Shepherd may never be reached. Lightfoot's authoritative view is itself indeterminate: "On the whole we may, though not without diffidence, adopt (2) the ancient tradition, which is definite and claims to be almost contemporary, as the safest guide; though confessedly (3) the modem suggestion has stronger support from internal evidence, such as it is."[2] Thus, he opts for a date in the era of A.D. 140-150, although

1. Joseph B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1984), pp. 293-294.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

he acknowledges that the internal evidence strongly suggests a date in the span of A.D. 90-100.

Schaff, on the contrary, is decisively supportive of an early date for The Shepherd, even allowing that it most probably was written by the very Hermas mentioned in Remans.[3] Lightfoot cites several writers supportive of the earlier date: Cotelier, Cave, Lardner, Gallandi, Lumper, Lachmann, Sprinzl.[4] More recently still, Lawson,[5] Goodspeed,[6] and others concur in the view that it was written in the A.D. 90s.

Nevertheless, there are those who argue – and quite persuasively – for a date earlier even still, a date only a decade and a half after A.D. 70. Oxford and Cambridge trained scholar Arthur S. Barnes argues most vigorously for this date.[7] Two of his arguments can be summarized as follows. First, the writer of the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 180) seems to be confused as to the identity of Hermas:

> Pius I, about 150, "changed the house of Pudens into a church, and gave it precedence over all the other parishes of Rome as the dwelling of the Bishop, and dedicated it with the title of the *Pastor*, that is, the Good Shepherd." This seems to be the original and true story and is told in the Roman Breviary for his feast on July 11th. The "Acts of Pastor and Timotheus", which are not authentic but contain some true traditions, make "Pastor" the brother of Pius, whom he put in charge of this church. There is the first confusion. The author of the Muratorian Fragment takes it a bit farther. He says: "the 'Pastor' of Hermas is not really ancient, for it was written by the brother of Pope Pius I quite lately". Thus we have a double confusion. The dedication of the church has been confused with the name of its priest, and he again has been confused with the name of the book which Hermas wrote.[8]

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3. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 2:688ff.

4. Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 294.

5. John Lawson, *A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 225.

6. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York Harper, 1950), p. 97; and *idem.*, *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1942), pp. 47-48.

7. Arthur Stapylton Barnes, *Christianity at Rome in the Apostolic Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, [1938] 1971), pp. 212ff.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 212. Robinson agrees; John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 320ff.

Second, the earlier date is suggested by its authoritative usage in Irenaeus, Ongen, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Jerome (*On the Lives of Illustrious Men* 10).9 Clearly Irenaeus considers it Scripture, for in *Against Heresies* (4:20:2) he quotes it (citing *Mandates* 1:1) as such. Origen in his commentary on Remans 16:14 says: "I think the Hermas there mentioned [i.e., in Rem. 16] is the writer of the book called *Pastor*; which writing appears to me to be very useful, and as I suppose, divinely inspired."[10] Tertullian, in his pre-Montanist days, seems to have agreed.[11] In addition, The Shepherd is included in the Codex Sinaiticus, indicating a strong respect for its authority. [12]

It should be recognized, then, that "the history of the ecclesiastical authority of Herrnas in the East begins with an unbounded recognition of the same as a book resting on divine revelation." [13] Lightfoot notes this same fact and adds that the book is "in general circulation in the Eastern and Western Churches, soon after the middle of the second century." [14] And, thus, "since the universally admitted requirement for this would be that they were considered to be the work of at least an associate of the Apostles, a date of about 75 or 80 would be much more likely and more suitable for the subject of the books in question as the writings of a Christian prophet ." [15]

A more recent early date advocate for The Shepherd of Hermas is John A. T. Robinson. In his bombshell treatise, *Redating the New Testament,* he sets forth a strong case for an early date for The Shepherd:

> With the Epistle of Barnabas must be considered its nearest associate, the Shepherd of Hermas. This again has regularly been placed in the middle of the second century, but solely on the ground of one piece of external evidence, the Muratorian Fragment on the Canon. . . .
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> . . . .

9. Schaff, *History* 2:687n. See also Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers,* p. *296.*

10. Cited from Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, 2* vols. (Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1:120. See also Origen, *Matthew 1421; On the Principles 411.*

11. *De Orationes* 16.

12. Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers,* p. *294.*

13. Theodor Zahn, *Der Hirt des Hermas* (Gotha: 1868). Cited in Schaff, *History* 2:691 n. 1.

14. Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers,* p. *293.*

15. *Ibid.,* p. 213.

> With regard to Hermas in particular there are good grounds for questioning its statements. Thus Irenaeus, who resided in Rome less than twenty years after thedeath of Pius, quotes the opening sentence of the first Mandate of the Shepherd as "scripture" *[Against Heresies* 4:34:2], which would scarcely be likely if it was known to have been composed within living memory. Not much later Tertullian strongly disparages Hermas in contrast with Hebrews and its seems improbable that he would not have deployed against it the argument of its late composition. Origen who freely cites the Shepherd as scripture, attributes it indeed in his *Commentary on Romans* to the first-century Hermas greeted by Paul in Rem. 16.14.16

A persuasive case can be made from the internal evidence which is decidedly against not only the Muratorian Canon's statement as to the date of The Shepherd, but even the date of A.D. 95 or 96, as well. Regarding the Muratorian Canon's identification of Hermas as the brother of Pius of Rome, it should be noted that if the identification is correct, a most remarkable situation exists. In defiance to an expectation based on the assertion of the Muratorian Canon, Hermas, a foster-child sold into slavery in Rome (*Vision* 1:1: 1), *never mention-s his alleged brother Pius, bishop of Rome.* And this despite the fact he does mention other family members. Moreover, nowhere in The Shepherd is there any indication that there exists anything approaching a monarchical episcopate – whether in Rome where Pius would have been such (Vision 2:4:3) or elsewhere. He speaks, instead, of "the elders that preside over the church" (Vision *2:4:3).* The explanation suggested above by Barnes and others as to the Canon's confusion suitably accounts for these matters.

Furthermore, in Vii"on 2:4:2ff. Hermas is told to write two books. One of these is to be sent to Clement who in turn "was to send it to foreign cities, for this is his duty." The other was to be sent to "Grapte," apparently a deaconess. 17 As Edmundson[18] and Robinson[19] carefully demonstrate, this implies Clement's role as a subordinate secretarial figure. Obviously, then, The Shepherd could not have been written later than about A.D. 90 after Clement was

16. Robinson, Redating, pp. 319-320.

17. George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longman's, Green, 1913), pp. 204.

18. *Ibid.,* pp. 203ff.

19. Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 321 ff.

appointed bishop of Rome.[20]

Still further, in *Vision* 3:5:1 Hermasnotes that"the apostles and bishops and teachers and deacons, who walked after the holiness of God, and exercised their office of bishop and teacher and deacons in purity and sanctity for the elect of God, some of them already fallen on sleep, and others still living." This strongly suggests (with *Similitude 9: 16)* that some of the earliest church leaders were still living at the time The Shepherd was written. This is more suggestive of a time before the 90s. Robinson suggests about A.D. 85.[21]

The Usefulness of The Shepherd

The possible usefulness of The Shepherd of Hermas for early date advocacy is strong especially *if* the early date of an era in the A.D. 80s be taken, but also even if the A.D. 90-95 era is assumed, for the following reason.

Many competent scholars detect evidence of Hermas's knowledge of Revelation. Moses Stuart states: "I can scarcely doubt, that the reading of the Apocalypse suggested to the writer of this book the form of his work."[22] In the authoritative series *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, A. Cleveland Coxe boldly claims that Revelation "is quoted in *Hermas* freely ."[23] R. H. Charles in his important critical commentary on Revelation holds quite strongly to the use of Revelation by Hermas: "In the Shepherd of Hermas, *Vis.* ii. 2.7, there is a very probable connection with our author." His note on this statement fills in the data leading to this conviction of a "very probable" connection:

> The fact that Hermas used the same imagery as [the Apocalypse] may be rightly used as evidence that he knew it. Thus the Church, *Vis.* ii. 4, is represented by a woman (cf. [Rev] 12:1 sqq.); the enemy of the Church by a beast (θηρίον), *Vis.* lv. 6-10, [Rev] 13: out of the

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20. The date of Clement's bishopric is debated, but within a generally agreed upon time-frame of between A.D. 85 to 92. Edmundson opts for an A.D. 92 appointment (Church in *Rome*, pp. 188, 241). Arguing for a date somewhere between A.D. 86 to 88 are Robinson, Redating, p. 322; Joseph B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2 vols. (Macmillan: 1889) 1:343; and Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der Alterchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius* (Leipzig: 1893-1897), p. 718. We shall return to this matter later.

21. Robinson, *Redating*, p. 322.

22. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:113.

23. Coxe, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF]*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [late 19th c.] 1975) 5:600.

> mouth of the beasts proceed fiery locusts, *Vis.* iv. 1, 6, [Rev] 9:3: whereas the foundation stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem bear the names of the Twelve Apostles, [Rev] 21:14, and those who overcome are made pillars in the spiritual temple, [Rev] 3:12, in Hermas the apostles and other teachers of the Church form the stones of the heavenly tower erected by the archangels, *Vis.* iii. 5. 1. The faithful in both are clothed in white and are given crowns to wear, [Rev] 6:11 etc., 2: 10; 3:10; Hermas, *Sire. viii. 2.* 1, *3.*[24]

Westcott and Hug agree,[25] and Swete comments that "it is hardly too bold to say with Bishop Westcott that 'the symbolism of the Apocalypse reappears in the *Shepherd.*' "[26]

In more recent times noted critics concur in this assessment; we mention but a few. Patristics scholar, Edgar J. Goodspeed, states that Hermas is "clearly acquainted with the Revelation of John."[27] John Lawson and Guthrie agree.[28] Mounce also leans in this direction: "While such parallels [between The Shepherd and Revelation] may indicate nothing more than that both books drew from a common apocalyptic tradition, the possibility that Hermas may have known the Apocalypse is by no means precluded."[29]

If a date in the A.D. 80s be given to The Shepherd (as is most plausible), and if the apparent allusions to Revelation in it are expressive of its dependency upon Revelation (as certainly seems the case), then Revelation influenced the writing of The Shepherd in the late A.D. 80s. The Shepherd was certainly written somewhere around Rome, for it mentions Clement (undoubtedly *the* Clement of Rome because of the recognition his name is expected to carry, cf. *Vision 2:4).* For John's Revelation to have been written, to have been copied (laboriously by hand), to have made its way to Rome by the 80s, and to have influenced the writing of another work, would be strong

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24. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John,* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1920) 1:xcvii.

25. B. F. Westcott, A General *Survey* of *the History of the Canon of the New Testament,* 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1870), p. 181; Johann Leonhard Hug, Introduction *to the New Testament,* trans. David Fosdick, Jr. (Andover: Gould and Newman, 1836), p. 659.

26. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. cx. He not only mentions Westcott in this regard, but Lardner as well.

27. Goodspeed, *Apostolic Fathers,* p. 97.

28. Lawson, *Apostolic Fathers,* p. 220; Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction,* 3d ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 931-932.

29. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 37.

evidence that it existed a good deal of time before A.D. 85+. It would, thus, be evidence against a date of c. A.D. 95 and supportive of a pre-A.D. 70 date.

Papias of Hierapolis

Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (c. A.D. 60-130), in Phrygia, Asia Minor, is reputed to have been a disciple of the Apostle John and a friend of Polycarp.[30] As such he would be an extremely early and valuable witness to historical matters of the sort with which we are dealing. Unfortunately, none of his written work is extant today. Our knowledge of his sayings is sparse, being preserved in a few brief excerpts in Eusebius and several other early fathers. His major work, *Exposition of the Lord's Oracles,* seems to have been lost sometime around the year 1218.[31]

There is, however, a fascinating and important piece of evidence purportedly from Papias that is quite revealing. Late date advocate Swete dealt with this evidence in his treatment of the Apostle John's extreme longevity. His comments are worth quoting in full, not only because of the potential value of their contents, but because of their being provided in the work of such a competent late date advocate:

> A MS. of Georgius Hamartolus (cent. IX.) alleges the authority of Papias, in the second book of his work, for the statement that John the son of Zebedee was martyred by the Jews, and the reference to Papias is now supported by an extract printed by Dr C. De Boor from an Oxford MS. of the 7th or 8th century, an epitome probably based upon the Chronicle of Philip of Side (cent. V).
>
> The Coislin MS. of Georgius adds at *Chron.* iii, 134: [*Ἰωάννης*] *μαρτυρίου κατηξίωται· Παπίας γὰρ ὁ Ἱεραπόλεως ἐπίσκοπος, αὐτόπτης τούτου γενόμενος, ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ λόγῳ τῶν Κυριακῶν λογίων φάσκει ὅτι ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἀνῃρέθη, πληρώσας δηλαδὴ μετὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τὴν τοῦ χριστοῦ περὶ αὐτῶν πρόρρησιν.* De Boor's fragment runs: *Παπίας ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ λόγῳ λέγει ὅτι Ἰωάννης ὁ θεολόγος καὶ Ἰάκωβος ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτοῦ ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων ἀνῃρεθησαν.*

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30. The relationship of Papias to John is disputed, although it seems that most scholars accept the ancient accounts of his friendship with John. See Schaff, *History* 2:697ff.

31. Cf. Schaff, *History* 2:695n; and Elgin S. Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History* (Chicago Moody, 1962), p. 319.

> With this testimony before us it is not easy to doubt that Papias made some such statement, for the suggestion of a lacuna, offered by Bishop Lightfoot in 1875, is now scarcely tenable, though it has been lately revived by Harnack. But if Papias made it, the question remains whether he made it under some misapprehension, or merely by way of expressing his conviction that the prophecy of Mic. x.39 had found a literal fulfillment. Neither explanation is very probable in view of the early date of Papias. He does not, however, affirm that the brothers suffered at the same time: the martyrdom of John at the hand of the Jews might have taken place at any date before the last days of Jerusalem.[32]

If these two pieces of data are in fact from Papias (as Swete, Lightfoot,[33] and other competent scholars are inclined to believe), they provide for those who hold to the Apostolic authorship of Revelation strong external evidence for a pre-A.D. 70 composition of Revelation. In that the excerpts, however, are not indisputably genuine, they cannot be reckoned conclusive. They serve merely as probable indicators – indicators that fit well with the mass of evidence to come.

The **Muratorian** Canon

In 1740 L. A. Muratori made his celebrated discovery and publication of a manuscript fragment that subsequently came to be known as "Canon Muratorianus."3[4]

The portion of this important manuscript dealing with the canon of Scripture claims to have been written by someone who was a contemporary of Pius, bishop of Rome, sometime between A.D. 127 and 157. R. L. Harris notes (by reference to Westcott) that "the date of the Canon is admitted to be close to 170 A.D. "3[5] This date was held earlier by Schaff, as well.[36] Lightfoot and Harmer argue that it

32. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. clxxix-clxxx.

33. Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers,* pp. 519, 531.

34. F. F. Bruce, The *Books and the Parchments,* 3rd ed. (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1963), p. 109. According to James J. L. Ratton, the relevant portion of this fragment was published by Muratori in *Antiq. Ital.,* 3:854. *See* Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R. & T. Washboume, 1912), p. 28. It is presently housed in the Ambrosian Library of Milan. It is an eighth century palimpsest and is designated: Cod. Ambros. J 101 sup.

35. R. Laird Harris, *The Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p. 214.

36. Schaff, *History* 1:776.

was written nearer A.D. 180.[37] Others believe Caius, Presbyter of Rome, wrote it about the year A.D. 200.[38] If written by Caius, it should be noted that he may well have been a student of Irenaeus.[39] But even if Caius did not compose it, it most certainly was drawn up by a writer from the latter half of the second century, the very era of Irenaeus.[40] As Schaff observes, it is "the oldest Latin church document of Rome, and of very great importance for the history of the canon. "[41]

The witness of this manuscript virtually demands the early date for Revelation. The relevant portion of the document states that "the blessed Apostle Paul, following the rule of his predecessor John, writes to no more than seven churches by name. " Later we read: "John too, indeed, in the Apocalypse, although he writes to only seven churches, yet addresses all. "[42] This ancient writer clearly teaches that John *preceded* Paul in writing letters to seven churches. And it is universally agreed among historians and theologians that Paul died before A.D. 70, either in A.D. 67 or 68.[43] This is a most important piece of early evidence with which to reckon.

If the common late date interpretation of Irenaeus is accepted, the Muratorian Canon records a contemporary tradition contrary to and despite Irenaeus. If we adopt the most reasonable reconstruction of Irenaeus and accept the clarifying of the ambiguity in Clement, as presented heretofore, then we have a trio of harmonious evidences, all from the same era.

Tertullian

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullian (c. A.D. 160-220), the first major theologian to write in Latin, lived in Carthage and began writing around A.D. 196. He is most famous for his *Apology*, but is

37. Lightfoot and Harmer, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 293.

38. Tim Dowley, *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Herts, England: Lion, 1977), p. 105. See also next note.

39. *ANF 5:599,603.*

40. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY Doubleday, 1969), p. 366.

41. Schaff, *History 1:776.*

42. *ANF* 5:603. The seven churches addressed by Paul would be Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica.

43. A. T. Robertson, "Paul" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 1st* ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1915) 3:2287; Richard Longenecker, *The Ministry and* Message *of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), p. 86.

also known for his five volume *Against Marcion*, his *Against Praxeas* (in which he developed the doctrine of the Trinity), and other lesser works. His era briefly overlaps that of Irenaeus.

The statement of Tertullian that is of significance to our inquiry is found in his *Exclusion of Heretics*. It strongly suggests that John's banishment occurred at the same time Peter and Paul suffered martyrdom. In his *Against Jovinianum*, Jerome certainly understood Tertullian to state that John was banished by Nero.[44] And it is difficult today to read Tertullian's statement and not come to such a conclusion. Tertullian's comment is as follows:

> But if thou art near to Italy, thou hast Rome, where we also have an authority close at hand. What an happy Church is that! on which the Apostles poured out all their doctrine, with their blood: where Peter had a like Passion with the Lord; where Paul bath for his crown the same death with John; where the Apostle John was plunged into boiling oil, and suffered nothing, and was afterwards banished to an island.[45]

Not only is this reference compellingly suggestive of at least Tertullian's acceptance of the fact, but there are converging lines of evidence that deepen our conviction that Tertullian did in fact mean what has been suggested. Hort found it noteworthy that when Tertullian speaks of Domitian's evil in the fifth chapter of his *Apology*, he does not mention anything about John's banishment or suffering under him.[46] Of course, such an ex *silentio* is not of the highest order of argument. Yet Hort's observation becomes especially remarkable in light of the prior Tertullianic statement, which unites the three Apostles under the Neronic persecution. All of this becomes all the more intriguing when even Eusebius follows suit in his *Evangelical Demonstration (3:5)*. Hort noted that Eusebius "groups in a single

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44. Jerome, *Against Jovinianum* 1:26. *See* Swete, Revelation, p. c. Robinson says: '<Jerome in quoting the passage interprets Tertullian to mean that John's suffering, like that of Peter and Paul, occurred under Nero – despite his own acceptance from Eusebius' *Chronicle* of the Domitianic date" (Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 223-224n). See also T. Randell, "Revelation, " in vol. 22 of *The Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1950), p. v.

45. Tertullian, *Exclusion of Heretics 36*. *See* Robinson, *Redating*, p. 223n, where he speaks of K. A. Eckhardt's "strong defence of Tertullian's reliability at this point."

46. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), pp. xv-xvii.

sentence Peter's crucifixion at Rome, Paul's beheading, and John's banishment to an island."[47] The sentence in question read: *Καὶ Πέτρος δὲ ἐπὶ Ῥώμης κατὰ κεφαλῆς σταυροῦται, Παῦλός τε ἀποτέμνεται, Ἰωάννης τε νήσῳ παραδίδοται.*

Stuart initially granted Tertullian to be a Domitianic reference, but later consideration persuaded him otherwise: "Now it strikes me, that Tertullian plainly means to class Peter, Paul, and John together, as having suffered at nearly the same time and under the same emperor. I concede that this is not a construction absolutely necessary; but I submit it to the candid, whether it is not the most probable."[48]

In a similar vein, historian Herbert B. Workman in his classic study, *Persecution in the Early Church*, draws the following conclusions from the Tertullianic evidence: "St. John's banishment to Patmos was itself a result of the great persecution of Nero. Hard labour for life in the mines and quarries of certain islands, especially Sardinia, formed one of the commonest punishments for Christians. . . . He lived through the horrors of two great persecutions, and died quietly in extreme old age at Ephesus."[49]

Furthermore, it would seem that Tertullian's reference to an attempted oil martyrdom ofJohn is quite plausible historically. This is due to the very nature of the Neronic persecution of Christians in A.D. 64. Roman historian Tacitus describes the gruesome scene – a scene so evilly horrific that, even though Tacitus disparaged Christians as "detested for their abominable crimes,"5° he was moved to sympathy for the Christians by Nero's actions: "And their death was aggravated with mockeries, insomuch that, wrapped in the hides of wild beasts, they were tom to pieces by dogs, or fastened to crosses to be set on fire, that when the darkness fell they might be burned to illuminate the night. . . . Whence it came about that, though the

47. *Ibid.*, p. xvii. See also Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Scranton, n.d.) 2:548.

48. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:284n.

49. Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1906] 1980), pp. 18, 19.

50. In this reference Tacitus apparently reflects the current suspicion that Christians engaged in lewd, promiscuous "love feasts" (the early Agape Feast), had cannibalistic services (the Lord's Supper being the blood and body of Christ), and worshiped the head of an ass.

victims were guilty and deserved the most exemplary punishment, a sense of pity was aroused by the feeling that they were sacrificed not on the altar of public interest, but to satisfy the cruelty of one man."[51] Such a spectacle surely would have involved the dipping of the victims in oil to provide a lasting illumination of fire. Thus, "if there is some foundation for the early tradition of the oil-martyrdom of John at Rome, or at Ephesus, it would naturally point to the Neronian persecution, in which Christians were covered with inflammable material and burned as torches."[52]

Schaff notes that "Tertullian's legend of the Roman oil-martyrdom ofJohn seems to point to Nero rather than to any other emperor, and was so understood by Jerome (*Adv. Jovin. 1.26)* ."[53] Elsewhere Tertullian mentions the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul at Rome, and states: "At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith."[54] Weiss is convinced that "Tertullian too, according to *Scorp.*, 15, certainly refers the "*relegatio in insulam*," of which he speaks in *Be Praesc. Haer., 36,* to the time of Nero, and was already understood in this sense by Hieron., *adv. Jovin,* 1, *26."*[55]

Thus, again, we have quite suggestive evidence – evidence at least partially overlapping Irenaeus's era – that John suffered under Nero. The external evidence is shifting its weight to an early date the more carefully we scrutinize the material.

Origen

Ongenes Adamantius of Alexandria (c. A.D. 185-254) is one of the indefatigable giants of early Church history. He was a disciple of Clement of Alexandria. As noted earlier, Origen is usually cited as among the leading external witnesses to a late date for Revelation. But the evidence drawn from his writings is very similar in nature to that of Clement of Alexandria's: at best, it is ambiguous; and it is quite capable of being interpreted in a way favorable to the early date position.

Origen's debated statement is: "The King of the Remans, as

51. *Annals* 15:44.
52. Schaff, *History* 1:428.
53. *Ibid., 1:428-429* n. 3.
54. Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 15.
55. Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament,* trans. A. J. K. Davidson, vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889) p. 51.

tradition teaches, condemned John, who bore testimony, on account of the word of truth, to the isle of Patmos. John, moreover, teaches us things respecting his testimony [i.e., martyrdom], without say'ing who condemned him when he utters these things in the Apocalypse. He seems also to have seen the Apocalypse . . . in the island."[56]

Needless to say, early date advocates find the use of Origen questionable, in that it is not at all clear that he had in mind Domitian as "the King of the Remans." Indeed, late date advocates are sometimes less than convincing themselves. Swete observes of the witness provided by Origen and Clement of Alexandria: "It will be seen that the Alexandria testimony is not explicit; the Emperor who banished John is not named either by Clement or Origen. But in the absence of evidence to the contrary they may be presumed to have followed in this respect the tradition of South Gaul and Asia Minor."[57] Charles argues similarly: "Neither in Clement nor Origen is Domitian's name given, but it may be *presumed* that it was in the mind of these writers."[58]

Early date proponent Hort states of this situation: "The absence of a name in both Clement and Origen certainly does not prove that no name was known to them. But the coincidence is curious."[59] Stuart sees the absence as more than "curious" and more than merely lacking the character of proof for late date advocacy:

> This remarkable passage deserves special notice. We cannot suppose Origen to have been ignorant of what Irenaeus said in V. 30. . . . Yet Origen does not at all refer to Irenaeus, as exhibiting anything decisive with regard to which Roman emperor it was who banished John. He does not even appeal to tradition, as according with the report of Irenaeus. Moreover he notes expressly, that John has not himself decided this matter in the Apocalypse. . . . If now he regarded the opinion of Irenaeus as decisive in relation to this subject, how could he have failed, on such an occasion, of appealing to it? . . . We cannot well come to any conclusion here, than that Origen knew of no way in which this matter could be determined.[60]

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56. Ongen, *Matthew* 16:6. Citation can be found in Charles, *Revelation* 1 :xciii; Swete, *Revelation*, p. xcix; Stuart, *Apocalypse 1:271.*

57. Swete, *Revelation,* p. xcix n. 2.

58. Charles, *Revelation* 1 :xciii.

59. Hort, *Apocalypse*, p. xv.

60. Stuart, *Apocalypse 1:271,272.*

Stuart's observation is quite reasonable – much more so than the presumptive guesses handed down as assured observations. His comment is especially reasonable since Origen *does* mention that Herod beheaded John's brother James. It may well be that Origen's statement depends not on an Irenaean tradition, but upon a Tertullianic one, as suggested by Robinson.[61] Or even better, perhaps, if our analysis of the evidence from Clement of Alexandria be correct, it could be that Origen picked up on his master, Clement, who seems to teach that John was exiled under Nero.

It is of further interest that Origen calls this unnamed emperor "the King of the Remans." Ratton understands this reference to be indicative of Nero:

> Throughout the East the Julian Caesars were looked upon as a royal line and hailed as Kings. . . . Nero was the last of them. After him came the successful generals raised to the purple by their legions. They took the title of Caesar, but prefixed it to their own names. They reigned by virtue of their leadership of the Army. The official title of Domitian illustrates both these points – "*Imperator Caesar Domitianus Augustus.* "[62]

Be that as it may, we come again upon a widely-acclaimed late date witness which is wholly unconvincing.

Victorious

Victorious (d. c. A.D. 304), bishop of Pettau (or Petavionensis), is another of the mainstays of the late date argument from tradition. Victorious's relevant statement is found in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* at Revelation 10:11. He states that: "When John said these things he was in the island of Patmos, condemned to the labour of the mines by Caesar Domitian. There, therefore, he saw the Apocalypse; and when grown old, he thought that he should at length receive his quittance by suffering, Domitian being killed, all his judgments were discharged. And John being dismissed from the mines, thus subsequently delivered the same Apocalypse which he had received from God."[63]

It is abundantly clear that Victorious, a pre-Eusebian witness,

61. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 223.
62. Ratton, *Apocalypse,* p. 29.
63. *ANF* 7:353.

taught that John was banished by Domitian. That which is striking about this traditional evidence, however, is that John, who was doubtless well into his 90s, could be condemned to the mines:

> Inevitably, therefore, when Domitian began his policy of persecution in 96, St. John must have been somewhere between ninety and a hundred years old. We are asked to believe that at that great age he was able to stand the journey as a prisoner from Ephesus to Rome – that is possible, for St. Polycarp stood it – to go through a trial before the Emperor; to be scourged publicly and cruelly in the Forum; to be banished to Patmos and to work under the lash in the mines; and, after having endured all this, to return to Ephesus still possessed of enough vigour to . . . reorganize the Churches of Asia and to survive, in spite of all this activity, for several years more.[64]

This difficulty is similar to that expressed above regarding Clement of Alexandria. Such difficulties tax to the very limit the credibility of the reference.

The Acts of John

There is also possible evidence to be garnered from the apocryphal *The Acts of John.* In this work – which is mentioned by Eusebius, Epiphanies, Augustine, and Photius – there is the establishment of a Domitianic exile, to be sure. But the *rationale* for the exile is suggestive of a prior publication of Revelation. And it could be that John was banished twice, once under Nero and later under Domitian (which would explain the two traditions of a Neronic and Domitianic exile). In *The Acts ofJohn we* read:

> And the fame of the teaching of John was spread abroad in Rome; and it came to the ears of Domitian that there was a certain Hebrew in Ephesus, John by name, who spread a report about the seat of empire [*sic*] of the Remans, saying that it would quickly be rooted out, and that the kingdom of the Remans would be given over to another. And Domitian, troubled by what was said, sent a centurion with soldiers to seize John, and bring him. . . . [Later when John appeared before Domitian, we read:] And Domitian, astonished at all the wonders, sent him away to an island, appointing for him a set time.
>
> And straightway John sailed to Patmos.[65]

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64. Barnes, *Christianity at Rome,* p. 166.
65. *See ANF* 8:560-562.

It would seem that this statement implies the publication of Revelation (what other Johannine work could be interpreted to indicate the overthrow of Rome?) prior to his banishment by Domitian. Why not in Nero's reign, as indicated in other traditions?

Eusebius Pamphili

Eusebius (c. A.D. 260-A.D. 340), Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine, is known as "the Father of Church History" due to his important and well-preserved work entitled *Ecclesiastical History*. Because of the clarity of his position on the matter (it is well-preserved in its original language and unambiguous), the stature of his person (he was a court adviser to Emperor Constantine, a prolific writer, and the author of a rather thorough Church history), and the nature of his work (he researched his history in writings no longer extant), he is universally acclaimed by late date advocates as a Domitianic witness.

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, at the very section which is cited as late date evidence by Swete and Charles, to name but two leading late date advocates,[66] we read:

> When Domitian had given many proofs of his great cruelty and had put to death without any reasonable trial no small number of men distinguished at Rome by family and career, and had punished without a cause myriads of other notable men by banishment and confiscation of their property, he finally showed himself the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us.
>
> At this time, the story goes, the Apostle and Evangelist John was still alive, and was condemned to live in the island of Patmos for his witness to the divine word. At any rate Irenaeus, writing about the number of the name ascribed to the anti-Christ in the so-called Apocalypse of John, states this about John in so many words in the fifth book against Heresies.[67]

As we analyze the weight of this evidence, we must bear in mind two problems: (1) Traditions had already been well established by Eusebius's time. And (2) unfortunately, Eusebius is "by no means very critical and discerning, and [is] far inferior in literary talent and

66. Swete, *Revelation,* p. xcix; Charles, *Revelation* 1:xciii.
67. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:17-18.

execution to the works of the great classical historians."[68] Consequently, "it is needless to quote later writers who say the same, for it is probable that most if not all of them derived their belief from this passage of Irenaeus."[69] Torrey adamantly states of the post-Irenaean, late date traditions: "the ultimate source in every case [are] the statements of Irenaeus."[70] In fact, regarding Eusebius we must realize that he patently declares his dependency upon Irenaeus in this matter.[71] Whatever difficulties there may be with Irenaeus (see previous discussion), such must necessarily apply to Eusebius, who clearly echoes his utterance.

Yet, there are some perplexing difficulties in the accounts in the Eusebian corpus, even apart from his Irenaean foundation. Let us briefly survey these problems.

In the first place, despite Eusebius's express dependence upon Irenaeus in this area, we should remember that Eusebius disagrees with Irenaeus on an extremely important and intimately related question. And this disagreement is despite Irenaeus's claim to have conversed with someone who knew John. Eusebius doubts Irenaeus's position that John the Apostle wrote Revelation:

> Thus the recognized writing of Clement is well known and the works of Ignatius and Polycarp have been spoken of, and of Papias five treatises are extant. . . . These are also mentioned by Irenaeus as though his only writing, for he says in one place, "To these things also Papias, the hearer of John, who was a companion of Polycarp and one of the ancients, bears witness in writing in the fourth of his books, for five books were composed by him." So says Irenaeus. Yet Papias himself, according to the preface of his treatises, makes plain that he had in no way been a hearer and eyewitness of the sacred Apostles. . . .
>
> It is here worth noting that [Papias] twice counts the name of John, and reckons the first John with Peter and James and Matthew and the other Apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist, but by changing his statement places the second with the others outside the number of the Apostles, putting Aristion before him and clearly calling him a

68. Schaff, *History* 1:28.

69. William Henry Simcox, *The Revelation of St. John Divine.* Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge University Press, 1898), p. xiii.

70. Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John (New* Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 78.

71. See *Ecclesiastical History* 3:18 and 5:8.

> presbyter. This confirms the truth of the story of those who have said that there were two of the same name in Asia, and that there are two tombs at Ephesus both still called John's. This calls for attention: *for it is probable that the second* (unless anyone prefer the former) *saw the revelation which passes under the name of John.* 72

To the unprejudiced mind it must be somewhat disconcerting to discover that the evidence from Eusebius is internally self-contradictory. For Eusebius *twice* establishes the Apostle's longevity based on Irenaeus's confident statement that he talked with an eyewitness of the Apostle (i.e., Polycarp) who says John wrote Revelation while exiled by Domitian.73 But in another place he discounts Irenaeus's teachings that Papias heard John and that John wrote Revelation. If Eusebius believed the one report, why not the other? The two issues — (1) that the Apostle John wrote Revelation (2) during Domitian's reign — are bound up together in Irenaeus. To doubt one necessarily would seem to entail the doubting of the other.

In the second place, Eusebius differs with Jerome in his references to the nature of John's nonagenarian activity in Ephesus after his returning from exile. Eusebius wholeheartedly endorses Clement of Alexandria's (incredible) account that John not only travelled about the region of Ephesus appointing bishops and reconciling whole churches, but also that while on horseback John chased with all of his might a young man.[74] Jerome (c. A.D. 340-420) alters Eusebius's and Clement's accounts by adding that John was too weak and had to be carried from church to church.[75] Jerome, it seems, is a little more careful in judging the plausibility of evidence.

Finally, Eusebius contradicts himself in his writings on the banishment of John. It is clear in his *Ecclesiastical History* that he believes John was banished under Domitian. But in *Evangelical Demonstrations*, he speaks of the execution of Peter and Paul in the same sentence with the banishment of John.[76] This is clearly suggestive of a contem-

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72. *Ibid.* 3:38:5; 3:29:1, *2, 5, 6.* Emphasis mine.

73. *Ibid. 3:181-3;* 5:8:5.

74. Ibid. 3:23:5ff.

75. Epistle to the Galatians 46.

76. Three scholars who have deemed this as contradictory are: F. N. Lee, "Revelation and Jerusalem" (Brisbane, Australia by the author, 1985) sect. 22; A. R. Fausset, in Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Commentary* 2:548; and P. S. Desprez, *The Apocalypse Fulfilled*, 2d ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1855), p. 5.

poraneousness of events. Consequently, it indicates that when he wrote *Evangelical Demonstrations,* he was convinced of a Neronic banishment of John.

Thus, again we discover that one of the leading witnesses from tradition for the late date of Revelation is not all that solid a piece of evidence.

Epiphanies of Salamis

Epiphanies (c. A.D. 315-403) was elected the bishop of Salamis, Cyprus, in about A.D. 367, and was an intimate friend of Jerome. He lacks the learned reputation of some of the noted fathers of the first centuries, but he apparently was widely read.

Epiphanies is noted for his unique witness to the banishment of John: he states twice that it was during the emperorship of Claudius.[77] He says that John wrote his Gospel "*μετὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς Πάτμου ἐπάνοδον, τὴν ἐπὶ Κλαυδίου γενομένην καίσαρος.*" Even more to our point, he wrote of the Revelation: "*προφητεύσαντος ἐν χρόνοις Κλαυδίου . . . δεικνυμένου τοῦ κατὰ τὴν Ἀποκάλυψιν λόγου προφητικοῦ*" (i.e., "who prophesied in the time of Claudius . . . the prophetic word according to the Apocalypse being disclosed").

A number of commentators and classicists see Epiphanies's statement not so much as a palpably absurd tradition, as a careless designation. Some scholars have suggested that Epiphanies may have used another of Nero's names, rather than his more common one. Hort suggests that Epiphanies may have been basing his information on Hippolytus (c. A.D. 170-236), and that he may have meant the notorious Nero: "But as one of his names [i.e., one of Claudius's names] was Nero, so also our Nero was likewise a Claudius, and is often called on inscriptions Nero Claudius or Nero Claudius Caesar. It seems probable therefore that, whatever Epiphanies may have meant, his authority meant and perhaps said Nero."[78] Other scholars who agree with an assessment such as Hort's include Moffat, Guthrie, Robinson, and Mounce,[79] to name but a few.

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77. *Heresies* 51:12, 33.

78. Hort, *Apocalypse,* p. xviii.

79. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament,* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 505; Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 957; Robinson, *Redating,* p. 224; and Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 31.

It clearly is the case that Epiphanies stands solidly in the early date tradition. It is extremely doubtful that he simply created his "evidence" *de novo.*

Jerome

The great monastic scholar Jerome (A.D. 340-420) was proficient in a number of languages. Pope Damascus directed him to produce a new Latin translation of Scripture, which is now known as the Vulgate.

In his *Against Jovinianum we* read that John was "a prophet, for he saw in the island of Patmos, to which he had been banished by the Emperor Domitian as a martyr for the Lord, an Apocalypse containing the boundless mysteries of the future. Tertullian, moreover, relates that he was sent to Rome, and that having been plunged into a jar of boiling oil he came out fresher and more active than when he went in."[80] Jerome's A.D. 393 statement regarding John's banishment by Domitian may be supportive of the argument for late date advocacy.[81] But, then again, it may not be as strongly supportive as many think, due to its context. The context tends to confuse the matter by giving evidence of Jerome's confounding of two traditions. As shown above, the reference from Tertullian would strongly suggest a Neronic date. Thus, at least Jerome's evidence cannot be indicative of anything like a unanimous persuasion of the late date in his era. Jerome serves as evidence of the early existence of two competing traditions regarding the date of John's banishment, and, hence, the date of Revelation.

Syriac Witnesses

The Syriac *History of John, the* Son *of Zebedee* makes reference to John's banishment under Nero.[82] It states: "After these things, when

80. Jerome, *Against Jovinianum* 1:26.

81. As cited by late date advocates, e.g., Swete, Revelation, p. c.; Charles, *Revelation* 1:xciii; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 32; Moffatt, Revelation, p. 320; Warfield, "Revelation," in Philip Schaff, cd., *A Religious Encyclopedia: Or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology (New* York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883) 5:2035; Merrill C. Tenney, "Revelation," in Merrill C. Tenney, cd., *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 721.

82. See William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,* 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Philo [1871] 1968) 2:55-57; and Hort, *Apocalypse,* p. xix.

the Gospel was increasing by the hands of the Apostles, Nero, the unclean and impure and wicked king, heard all that had happened at Ephesus. And he sent [and] took all that the procurator had, and imprisoned him; and laid hold of S. John and drove him into exile; and passed sentence on the city that it should be laid waste."[83] This ancient statement is clear and to the point.

Elsewhere in the Syriac tradition, we should note that "both of the Syriac Versions of the Revelation give in the title the statement that John was banished by Nero."[84] Though the earlier canon of the true Peshitta (or Syriac Vulgate) version of the fifth century did not contain Revelation at all,[85] the sixth and seventh century editions of the Syriac New Testament did. In them *The Apocalypse of St. John* agrees with a Neronic banishment for John.[86] One version is "beyond doubt"[87] that of Thomas of Harkel (A.D. 616). The other most probably is the edition prepared in A.D. 508 by Polycarpus, the chorepiscopus of Philoxenus, Bishop of Mabbug, hence its designation as the Philoxenian version.[88] Their titles say "written in Patmos, whither John was sent by Nero Caesar. "[89]

Andreas of Cappadocia

Andreas was bishop of Cappadocia (probably near the commencement of the sixth century).[90] He is known either as Andrew of Caesarea or Andreas of Cappadocian Caesarea. He wrote a commentary on Revelation which is still extant.

It is clear from reading him that he prefers a Dornitianic date for

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83. Wright Apocryphal Acts 2:55.

84. Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919), pp. 76-77. See also Swete, *Revelation*, p. C; Hort, *Apocalypse*, p. xix.

85. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. *68-71.*

86. John Gwynn, cd., *The Apocalypse of St John in a Syriac Version Hitherto Unknown* (Amsterdam: APA-Philo, [1896] 1981), p. 1.

87. Swete, *Revelation*, p. cxciv.

88. Metzger, *Text*, p. 70. See also Gwynn, p. iv. See all of chap. 6 for a detailed analysis.

89. Stuart, *Apocalypse 1:267.*

90. Though his dates are difficult to pinpoint, it seems agreeable to most scholars that he flourished in either the latter part of the fifth century or the earlier part of the sixth. See Stuart, *Revelation* 1:267; Swete, *Revelation,* cxcix; Schaff, *Encyclopedia* 1:83; and W. Smith and Henry Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects, and Doctrines* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1877-1888) 1:154ff.

Revelation. He frequently challenges, however, other interpreters of his era who apply several of the prophecies of Revelation to the Jewish War under Vespasian and Titus.gl At Revelation 6:12, for instance, he writes: "There are not wanting those who apply this passage to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by Titus." On the interpretation of Revelation 7:1 he comments: "These things are referred by some to those sufferings which were inflicted by the Remans upon the Jews." On Revelation 7:2 he observes: "Although these things happened in part to Jewish Christians, who escaped the evils inflicted on Jerusalem by the Remans, yet they more probably refer to Anti-christ." From such statements it would appear evident that there were several ("there are not wanting" and "some") noted commentators who flourished in the sixth century (or before!) who necessarily held to a pre-A.D. 70 date for Revelation.

Arethas

According to A. R. Fausset, "Arethas, in the sixth century,[92] applies the sixth seal to the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.), adding that the Apocalypse was written before that event ."[93] Like Andreas, he wrote a commentary on Revelation. Desprez cites Arethas's comments on several verses .94 On Revelation 6:12 Arethas writes: "Some refer this to the siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian." On Revelation 7:1 he notes: "Here, then, were manifestly shown to the Evangelist what things were to befall the Jews in their war against the Romans, in the way of avenging the sufferings inflicted upon Christ." Of Revelation 7:4 we read: "When the Evangelist received these oracles, the destruction in which the Jews were involved was not yet inflicted by the Remans."

Stuart records some additional observations from Arethas's commentary worthy of consideration.95 In his comments on Revelation 1:9, Arethas writes: "John was banished to the isle of Patmos under

91. See Stuart, *Revelation* 1:267; Desprez, *Apocalypse*, p. 7.

92. Some scholars, most notably Stuart (*Apocalypse* 1:268) and Fausset (Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Commentary*) assign Arethas to the sixth century. Others assign him much later to c. A.D. 914. For example Swete, Revelation, p. cxcix (on the strength of Harnack's argument); and Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), p. xxxvii.

93. Fausset, in Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *Commentary* 2:548.

94. Desprez, *Apocalypse*, p. 7.

95. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:268.

Domitian, Eusebius alleges in his Chronicon." Arethas does not appear to be satisfied with what Eusebius "alleges." This is all the more evident in his comments on Revelation 7:1 and 7:4 (see above); there Arethas speaks his own mind. He then goes on to note that Josephus records the fulfillment of the predictions in the seals. Stuart saw these – and rightly, it would seem – to be compellingly suggestive of a pre-A.D. 70 date for Revelation.

Theophylact

A much later witness is Theophylact, Metropolitan of Bulgaria and noted Byzantine exegete (d. 1107). He gives evidence of a dual tradition on John's banishment. He puts Revelation "under Trajan, but elsewhere gives a date which would bring it into the time of Nero."[96] In his *Preface to Commentary on the Gospel of John,* Theophylact puts the banishment of John under Nero when he says John was banished thirty-two years after the ascension of Christ[97]: "*ἐν Πάτμῳ τῇ νήσῳ ἐξόριστος διατελῶν μετὰ τριακονταδύο ἔτη τῆς τοῦ χριστοῦ ἀναλήψεως.*" In his commentary on Matthew 20:22 he mentions John's banishment under Trajan![98]

Conclusion

The above survey shows that the Domitianic date cannot be certainly established from the external evidence. Indeed, when carefully scrutinized, the evidence even tilts in the opposite direction. Thus, Guthrie's statement does not appear to be well taken: "It would be strange, if the book really was produced at the end of Nero's reign, that so strong a tradition arose associating it with Domitian's."[99] The Domitianic evidence is less than compelling.

Irenaeus's statement, the major evidence by far, is grammatically ambiguous and easily susceptible to a most reasonable re-interpretation. The re-interpretive approach would totally eliminate him as a positive late date witness. The evidences from Clement of Alexandria

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96. Peake, *Revelation,* p. 77. Cp. Swete, *Revelation,* p. c; and Charles, *Revelation* 1:xcii.

97. For the Greek, see Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:269.

98. Among ancient writers only Dorotheus, bishop of Tyre in the sixth century, agrees with such a late date for John's banishment to Patmos; see his *Synopsis de vita et morte prophetarum. See* Swete, *Revelation,* p. c; and Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:269. It should be noted that Dorotheus only says that the Gospel (not Revelation) was written at this time.

99. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 960.

and Origen, the second and third most significant witnesses to the Domitianic date, are more in the mind of the modern reader than in the script of the ancient texts. The important references from both of these two fathers not only lack the name "Domitian," but are more easily understandable if dealing with Nero. In the case of Clement particularly, it would appear that a Neronic date would be demanded, and not simply suggested. That these two witnesses were ever deemed notable examples of the late date witness is quite remarkable. Andreas clearly supports a Domitianic banishment, but in doing so he must debate a plurality of competing exegetes prior to and during his own era who hold to a Neronic date. Victorious is a sure witness, but alone in unambiguous testimony among the major references.

There are some witnesses that may hint at a pre-A.D. 70 dating for Revelation, such as The Shepherd of Hermas and Papias. Yet, other sources are even more suggestive of a Neronic banishment: the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, and Epiphanies. Others seem to imply *both* dates for John's banishment: Eusebius (cf. *Ecclesiastical History* with *Evangelical Demonstrations)* and Jerome. These at least suggest either an early competition between theories, or a double banishment of John, once under Nero and later under Domitian.

On the other hand, undeniably supportive of a Neronic date are Arethas, the Syriac *History of John*, the Syriac versions of Revelation, and Theophylact.

Obviously, then, there was no sure, uniform, and certain tradition in the early centuries of the Church on this matter. All that is certain is that John was banished to Patmos and there wrote Revelation. In the matter of details, there is confusion and contradiction that betrays the possibility of various hypotheses floating about, rather than firm convictions. This is possibly why neither Clement of Alexandria nor Origen ventured to explicitly name the emperor of the banishment. They surely knew of Irenaeus's statements, yet they neglected to refer to them on this matter. All things considered, however, even the external evidence leans toward a Neronic date.

PART III

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE

7

THE ROLE OF INTERNAL EVIDENCE

We come now, at last, to the presentation of the major arguments for the early date of Revelation. The evidences analyzed herein should be considered the fundamental arguments of early date advocacy. Following the presentation of the positive internal evidence, will be given an analysis of and rebuttal to the four leading objections to the early date from the internal evidence.

The **Significance** of Internal Evidence

As observed previously, it has often been the case that the external witness to Revelation's date has been a major — perhaps *the* major — stumbling block to the acceptance of an early date. Hence, our lengthy survey and analysis of the external evidence. Working from biblical presuppositions as to the nature and integrity of Scripture, the convictions of orthodox, conservative Christianity must recognize that the essential and determinative evidence ought to be drawn from the *internal* testimony of the scriptural record itself, when it is available. In this regard, the argument put forward by Ned B. Stonehouse for a change of terminology in the field of Biblical Introduction is very much to the point before us (even though his original considerations were with questions related to the Synoptic Problem). Stonehouse calls for an abandonment of the internal/external nomenclature in the field in favor of a self-witness/tradition distinction:

> In using the terms "tradition" and "self-witness," it may be well to point out, I am deliberately abandoning the older terminology employed in my undergraduate course of studies, namely, "external and internal evidence." Since I have exactly the same contents in view in my distinctions as my teachers had in theirs, the difference being pointed up hardly involves a serious dispute with them. There is

> nevertheless, I believe, a distinct advantage in rejecting the older terminology in favor ofthat which is used here because in this fashion greater justice can bedoneto the profound difference between external and internal evidence, especially as this difference is related to the contents of Scripture. It is difficult indeed to exaggerate the value of the knowledge gained from tradition; without it we should be in a position of incomparably deeper ignorance than we now are. Nevertheless, the testimony of tradition cannot rise above the level of tradition whereas the self-witness of the Gospels and other writings in Scripture, in the very nature of the case, is of a qualitatively different kind. In coming to ultimate judgments concerning a document nothing can be alleged against that which it discloses itself as being by its very contents. And the qualitative nature of this difference is underscored when, as in the case of the Gospels, we are dealing with the witness of Scripture itself. [1]

Stonehouse's point is well-taken, and should be especially persuasive among those of orthodox, conservative convictions. Although the standard terminology has been retained in the present study, it has been so merely for the sake of convenience. The implications should be understood to be those expressed by Stonehouse.

Historical Use of Revelation's Internal Evidence

Up until the first couple of decades in this century it could be stated rather confidently that "no critic of any note has ever claimed that the later date [for Revelation] is required by any internal evidence."2 Today this statement is no longer valid. Indeed, at least one late date advocate of note, Leon Morris, in an unusual procedure considers *only* internal indications for the date in his commentary (although he does mention evidence from tradition in one footnote).[3]

Those of the early date school have set forth a broad array of internal evidences in defense of their position — some more and some

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1. Ned B. Stonehouse, *Origins of the Synoptic Gospels* (London: Tyndale, 1963), pp. 1, 2.

2. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), p. 240.

3. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 34-40. It should be realized that Morris's commentary does not claim to be a "critical commentary"; nevertheless, he is a competent New Testament critic of the highest calibre and does deal with certain of the critical aspects of Revelation.

less compelling. Some of the evidences propounded by early date advocates of higher critical persuasions are even based on anti-supernaturalistic presuppositions.[4] Early date evidences considered to be the most significant set forth by several nineteenth century scholars will be briefly mentioned for two reasons. We do this, first, in order to provide some historical background to the debate, and, second, as a means of illustrating the variety of avenues that have been explored in this matter.

Macdonald settles upon six major lines of evidence.[5] His arguments are as follows: (1) The peculiar idiom of Revelation indicates a younger John, before his mastery of the Greek language, a mastery evidenced in his more polished Gospel from a later period. (2) The existence of only seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 1) indicates a date before the greater expansion of Christianity into that region. (3) The activity of Judaizing heretics in the Church (Rev. 2, 3) should be less conspicuous after a broader circulation of Paul's anti-Judaizing letters. (4) The prominence of the Jewish persecution of Christianity (Rev. 6, 11) indicates the relative safety and confidence of the Jews in their land. (5) The existence and integrity of Jerusalem and the Temple (Rev. 11) suggest the early date. (6) The reign of the sixth emperor (Rev. 17) must indicate a date in the A.D. 60s.

Of these arguments, Milton S. Terry endorses numbers 1, 2, 4, and 5; he also adds a couple of additional considerations: (7) There is a lack of internal evidence in Revelation for a late date. (8) The nearness of the events had no fulfillment beyond the dramatic events of A.D. 70.[6] F. W. Farrar allows for Macdonald's arguments 5 and 6, and adds another: (9) It is easy to apply Revelation's prophecies to the Jewish War.[7] Schaff allows for three of the above arguments: Macdonald's numbers 5 and 6, and Farrar's additional argument regarding the nature of the events of the Jewish War. Schaff also expands on Macdonald's argument 4 by reference to the existence of

4. E.g., John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1976), *passim*; and Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale: 1958), *passim*.

5. James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), pp. 152-167.

6. Terry, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 240ff.

7. Frederick W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, 1884), pp. 412ff.

the Twelve Tribes, assumed intact in Revelation 7:4-8.[8]

As we seek to establish an early date for Revelation in this the major portion of our study, honesty compels us to admit at the outset that there are many good scholars of *both* schools of dating who agree with the assertion of late date advocate Martin Kiddie: "There is no direct evidence in REVELATION itself to indicate any precise date for its composition."[9] Guthrie admits the significance of internal evidence in matters of Introduction, but, in the case before us, doubts if Revelation offers any.[10] Even early date advocate F. J. A. Hort is not really persuaded that there are *direct* internal evidences leading in this direction. Regarding those offered – such as those mentioned above – he doubts whether we should "lay much stress upon them." He deems the positive internal evidences as merely "interesting."[11]

The critical determination of noted early date advocates of Hort's line of thinking is founded upon an evaluation that gives more weight to discreet literary and psychological indicators than to what many early date advocates deem to be direct statements of chronological significance or objective historical allusions. Though these are, nevertheless, internal indicators (they have to do with self-witness, rather than with tradition), they tend to be more subjective or atmospheric than objective and concrete. For instance, Hort lists two "grounds for asserting the Neronian date" that seemed to him to be "decisive":

> (1) The whole language about Rome and the empire, Babylon and the Beast, fits the last days of Nero and the time immediately following, and does not fit the short local reign of terror under Domitian. Nero affected the imagination of the world as Domitian, as far as we know, never did. . . .
>
> (2) The book breathes the atmosphere of a time of wild commotion. . . . Under Vespasian, however, the old stability seemed to return: it lasted on practically for above a century more. Nothing at all corresponding to the tumultuous days after Nero is known in Domitian's reign, or the time which followed it. . . . It is only in the

8. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:835ff.

9. Martin Kiddie, *The Revelation of St. John (New* York: Harper and Bros., 1940), p. xxxvi. That he holds to a late date theory can be seen on p. xl of his work.

10. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction,* 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 957. Emphasis mine.

11. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xxviii.

> anarchy of the earlier time that we can recognise a state of things that will account for the tone of the Apocalypse. [12]

These observations are quite suggestive and will be dealt with later. Yet despite Hort's hesitancy at acknowledging positive, objective historical indicators in Revelation, his use of the literary and subjective arguments is helpful to formulating the early date position. Even early date advocates who recognize more objective historical indicators within Revelation often make use of the subjective data as well. For instance, Stuart considers the psychological implications of a late date composition when he notes that "the fiery phantasy or lively imagination everywhere exhibited in the Apocalypse, can with more probability be predicted ofJohn at some sixty years of age, than at eighty-five or ninety." [13] Robinson follows suit when he surmises that "it is difficult to credit that a work so vigorous as the Apocalypse could really be the product of a nonagenarian, as John the son of Zebedee must by then have been, even if he were as much as ten years younger than Jesus." [14]

Beyond such psychological implications, there are also the literary implications. Westcott states the older literary argument ably when he writes:

> The irregularities of style in the Apocalypse appear to be due not so much to ignorance of the language as to a free treatment of it, by one who used it as a foreign dialect. Nor is it difficult to see that in any case intercourse with a Greek-speaking people would in a short time naturally reduce the style of the author of the Apocalypse to that of the author of the Gospel. It is, however, very difficult to suppose that the language of the writer of the Gospel could pass at a later time in a Greek-speaking country into the language of the Apocalypse. . . .
>
> Of the two books the Apocalypse is the earlier. It is less developed both in thought and style. The material imagery in which it is composed includes the idea of progress in interpretation. . . .
>
> The Apocalypse is after the close of St. Paul's work. It shows in its mode of dealing with Old Testament figures a close connexion with the Epistle to the Hebrews (2 Peter, Jude). And on the other hand it

12. *Ibid.*, pp. xxvi, xxvii.

13. Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1:280.

14. Robinson, Redating, p. 222.

is before the destruction of Jerusalem.[15]

The present writer deems certain of the arguments suggested above to be doubtful. For instance, many early date advocates, especially of the 1800s and very early 1900s (among them we could list Macdonald, Terry, and Schaff,[16] to name but a few), used the argument from idiom. The validity of these observations, however, is questionable. The "crudeness" of Revelation's Greek does not necessarily suggest a primitive grasp of the language. Its unusual grammar and syntax are perhaps more determined by the purpose at hand (prophetic panorama), the means of its reception (by vision through angelic mediator, e.g., Rev. 1:1), and the subject matter (covenantal wrath). Austin Farrer observes that "the suggestion that St. John wrote like this because he knew no better may be dismissed out of hand. He was writing a Christian Ezekiel or Zechariah in the phrase of the Old."[17] Farrer suggests that John adopted "an artificial language, Septuagintic Greek, in which to handle" the imagery.[18] John, as it were, wrote in much the same way as a modern rapturous saint might write using the language of the King James Version. Septuagintic Greek permeated John's mind and heart while he was overwhelmed (cf. Rev. 1:17; 5:4; 17:6; 19: 10) by the drama unfolding before him (he "saw," 1:2; 5:1,6; 6:1ff.; 7:1ff.; 8:2ff.; 9:1ff.; 10:1; etc.) and around him (he experienced, Rev. 1:12, 17; 4:1, 2; 10:4, 9, 10; 11:1, 2; 13:1; 19:10; etc.).

In addition, the argument from the number of churches may be discounted as based upon insufficient evidence. The number could well be a limitation based on symbolic requirements. And if there were many churches, it would have been cumbersome to list them all in the preface; the churches listed could be representative churches.

Certain of the arguments, however, are not only stronger, but virtually certain, e.g. the contemporary reign of the sixth king[19] and

15. Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1908] 1980), pp. clxxiv-clxxv.

16. Macdonald, *Life of St. John,* pp. 152-154; Terry, *Hermeneutics*, pp. 240-241; Schaff, *History* 1:428-429. At one time this was deemed to be the major argument by some, e.g., Westcott, *Gospel According to John.*

17. Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images* (Boston: Beacon, 1949), p. 24.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Feuillet observes of the relative strength of the internal evidence from Revelation 17 as compared to the external evidence from Irenaeus: "The chief objection which could

the integrity of the Temple and Jerusalem. These arguments, along with several others, will serve as the focus of the present study as the primary chronological allusions.

Thus, despite Kiddie, Guthrie and others of the late date school, and those such as Hort of the early date school, there do seem to be both inherently suggestive and positively compelling historical time-frame indicators in Revelation. It is remarkable that whereas Kiddie, for instance, may absolutely deny the presence of internal indications, others — no less scholarly – may just as strongly assert the contrary. The internal historical evidences compel the noted F. W. Farrar to be "all but certain" as to the date of the book.[20] Stuart feels the same certainty of conviction when he writes: "If there be anything certain in the principles of hermeneutics, it is certain that they decide in favour of a reference to Judea and its capital in Rev. vi – xi. The very fact, moreover, that the destruction of Jerusalem (chap. xi) is depicted in such outlines and mere sketches, shows that it was then *future*, when the book was written. It is out of all question, except by mere violence, to give a different interpretation to this part of the Apocalypse."[21]

Macdonald argues that "it will be found that no book of the New Testament more abounds in passages which clearly have respect to the time when it was written."[22] Historian Edmundson writes 'hat "the Apocalypse is full of references to historical events of which the author had quite recently been himself an eyewitness at Rome, or which were fresh in the memories of the Roman Christians with whom he had been associating."[23] He chooses a pre-A.D. 70 date and states dogmatically that "the witness of the contents of the book itself, as will be shown, amply justifies such an assertion. "[24] Torrey vigor-

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be raised against the date indicated by Irenaeus, is the Apocalypse passage (17:9-11), which refers to the 7 heads of the one Beast. . . ." He sees the seventh as being either Otho or Vespasian (Andre Feuillet, *The Apocalypse*, trans. Thomas E. Crane [Staten Island: Alba House, 1965], p. 90).

20. Farrar, *Early Days*, p. 413.

21. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:276.

22. Macdonald, *Life of John*, p. 152.

23. George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longman's Green, 1913), p. 164. He goes on to observe that "there is a certain amount of external evidence, which has had much more weight than it deserves, apparently supporting a late date" (i.e., Irenaeus).

24. *Ibid.*

ously asserts not only the clear existence, but also the weightiness, of the internal evidence for determining Revelation's date: "The positive indications of an early date are numerous, definite, and all pointing to the same time. "[25] In Revelation are "plain and very definite historical allusions."[26]

Conclusion

We will show that upon a careful examination of the issues, it is difficult to disagree with the convictions that are shared by Farrar, Stuart, Edmundson, Torrey, and others on this matter. The remainder of this study will be given to an in-depth consideration of the internal evidences, seeking to establish those supportive of an early date (Part III), and critically analyzing and disposing of those major arguments from the internal evidence that are alleged to militate against the early date (Part IV).

25. Torrey, *Apocalypse*, p. 79.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

8

THE THEME OF REVELATION

Although the differing interpretations of Revelation are extremely numerous and quite varied, there is a relatively broad consensus among commentators regarding at least one major interpretive issue. That issue is the matter of the basic *theme* of Revelation. Certainly an author's theme, if stated, is of prime hermeneutical importance for the proper understanding of his intent. And since we now turn our attention to the internal evidence, the determination of the theme of Revelation holds potential value for our inquiry. Yet, although the *fact* of Revelation's theme is widely agreed upon,[1] the *nature* of the fulfillment of the fact is not so broadly agreed upon. Nevertheless, we will show that the recognition of this theme and its proper explication are of much assistance to our inquiry.

Determination of the Theme

The theme of Revelation is found in its introduction at Revelation 1:7: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen." Stuart writes of this verse: "Here then, on the very front of the book, is exhibited a title-page, as it were indicative of a conspicuous part of the contents of the work."[2]

A number of scholars agree with Stuart's assessment. Duster-

1. The theme's being contained in verse 7 is *widely*, though not universally, agreed upon. Hendriksen begins his comments on verse 7: "This is not the central theme of the book" (William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967], p. 68). He recognizes, though, that he is in disagreement with "many excellent commentaries" (p. 263, endnote 9). His disagreement seems, however, to have more to do with the *nature* of the interpretation of Revelation 1:7 than with the actual fact (see pp. 12-14, 68).

2. Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1:273.

dieck, for instance, sees verse 7 as the "principal theme"[3] that expresses "the fundamental idea . . .of the whole book."[4] Weiss views it as "a motto for the whole book."5 Justin A. Smith comments that "if any one theme can be named as the absorbing and comprehensive one in this book, it must be given to us in the words (1:7), 'Behold, he cometh with clouds.' "[6] Of Revelation 1:7, 8, Terry observes that "these two verses contain, first, a solemn declaration of the great theme of the book."[7] Russell argues that this verse is "the keynote of the Apocalypse" that "is the thesis or text of the whole."[8] T. D. Bernard in his Bampton Lectures at Oxford University calls this verse "the first voice, and the keynote of the whole."[9] Donald W. Richardson states of this verse: "The Coming of the Lord is the dominant note of the book."[10] Chilton concurs: "Verse 7 announces the theme of the book."[11]

That these observations as to Revelation's theme are correct should be evident in the emphasis placed on His coming that is a constant refrain in the personal letters to the Seven Churches (Rev. 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 20) and elsewhere (Rev. 16:15; 22:7, 12, 20). As Düsterdieck observes: "He (Christ) cometh; this is the theme of the Apoc., which is expressed here not in indefinite generality, but directly afterwards its chief points, as they are further unfolded in the book, are stated."[12] The thematic idea is not only introduced early in the work (Rev. 1:7); and it not only closes it (Rev. 22:20); but it is also presented dramatically with an attention-demanding "Behold!" at its initial appearance. Clearly something of tremendous

3. Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical* and Exegetical *Handbook to the Revelation of John, 3rd* cd., trans. Henry E. Jacobs (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), p. 28.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. A. J. K. Davidson, vol. 2 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889), p. 71.

6. Justin A. Smith, *Commentary on the Revelation.* An American Commentary on the New Testament (Valley Forge: Judson, [1884] rep. n.d.), p. 18.

7. Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Apocalyptics (New* York Eaton and Mains, 1898), p. 280.

8. J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Corning,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1887] 1983), p. 368.

9. Thomas Dehany Bernard, *Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1864] 1949), p. 213.

10. Donald W. Richardson, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1964), p. 28.

11. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 64.

12. Düsterdieck, *Revelation,* p. 105.

import is being introduced. But what is expected? And how is it anticipated? Further, how does it assist in our inquiry?

Explication of the Theme

The nature of the event has to do with a "Cloud-Coming" of Christ. It is necessary here to understand the Old Testament backdrop for a proper comprehension of the matter. The Old Testament frequently uses clouds as indicators of divine judgment. God is said to be surrounded with thick, foreboding clouds as emblems of His unapproachable holiness and righteousness (Gen. 15:17; Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19-20; 19:9, 16-19; Deut. 4:11; Job 22:14; Psa. 18:8ff.; 97:2; 104:3; Isa. 19: 1; Eze. 32:7-8). He is poetically portrayed as coming in clouds in historical judgments upon men (Psa. 18:7-15; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Joel 2:1, 2; Nab. 1:2ff.; Zeph. 1:14, 15). Thus, the New Testament speaks of Christ's coming in clouds of judgment in history at Matthew 24:30 and 26:64, not to mention His Second Coming at the end of world history (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4: 13ff.). His Cloud-Coming is a Judgment-Coming that brings mourning. But upon whom? And when? And how? Fortunately — and as expected in such a context with an attention arresting "behold" – time cues exist within the theme text, and can be found in the other New Testament allusions to this same passage. And along with these time cues we can surmise the objects of His wrath. The passage clearly states that He will come and cause mourning among "those who pierced Him" and upon "all the tribes of the earth. " Let us consider each of these separately and then merge them together to form a complete picture.

"Those Who Pierced Him"

Who are "those who pierced Him"? Although it is true that the Romans were responsible for physically nailing Him to the cross[13] (John 18:30-3 1), the onus of the divine curse indisputably falls squarely upon those who instigated and demanded it: the Jews. "If the Romans took any part in doing this, it was a merely ministerial and subordinate part. The Jews were the instigators and the proper authors of the deed." [14] The biblical record is quite clear: the Jews are

13. The very fact that He was sentenced to die by crucifixion (a Roman punishment) and not stoning (a Jewish punishment) is by itself indicative of the physical involvement of the Roman judicial apparatus.

14. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:272-273.

the ones who sought His death (John 11:53; Matt. 26:4; 27:1), who paid to have Him captured (Matt. 26:14-15, 47; 27:3-9), who brought false witnesses against Him (Matt. 27:59-62), who initially convicted Him (Matt. 27:65-66), who turned Him over to Roman authorities (Matt. 27:2, 11, 12; Acts 3:13), and who even arrogantly (and disastrously!) called down His blood upon their own heads (Matt. 27:24-25). John even tells us in his Gospel that the Roman Procurator, Pontius Pilate, sought to free Jesus, finding no fault in Him (John 18:38; 19: 12; cp. Acts 3:13). But the Jews demanded that the robber Barabbas be released instead of Christ (John 18:39, 40), and that Christ be immediately crucified (John 19:6, 15). They even subtly threatened Pilate's tenuous Roman procuratorship by affirming "we have no king but Caesar" (John 19:14-15), suggesting that Pilate was allowing Christ to supplant Caesar. And Jesus Himself, during the course of these events, specifically pointed out to Pilate: "he who delivered Me up to you has the greater sin" (John 19:11).

In Acts 2:22-23, 36, Peter laid the blame largely on Israel: "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, *you nailed to a cross* by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. . . . Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified." He does the same in a sermon in Acts 3:13-15a: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom *you* delivered up, and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life. " He repeats this to the Jews in Acts 5:30 where he proclaims: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom *you* had put to death by hanging Him on a cross."

Stephen, in Acts 7:52, declares the same fact as does Peter: "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and *murderers you* have now become. " Paul concurs in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-15: "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for

you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the *Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus* and the prophets, and drove us out."

This consistent and constant witness against the Jews in the canon of the New Testament continues into post-apostolic Church history. Let us list a few of the sources where the idea is pressed by the early Church fathers. We will quote the fathers occasionally to illustrate the nature of the comments. The references are all taken from Roberts and Donaldson's *The Ante-Nicene Fathers;* parenthetical page numbers are to this work. [15]

Ignatius (c. A.D. 50-115) quite frequently drives home the point of Jewish culpability regarding Christ's death. In chapter 11 of his *Epistle to the Magnesians* (*ANF* 1:64) he speaks of the "Christ-killing Jews." In chapter 11 of the *Epistle to the Trallians (ANF* 1:71), he speaks of the Jews as "those fighters against God, those murderers of the Lord." In the *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans,* chapter 2 *(ANF* 1:87), he says: "The Word raised up again His own temple on the third day, when it had been destroyed by the Jews fighting against Christ." In chapter 2 of the spurious (but ancient) *Epistle to Hero (ANF* 1: 113), the writer casts reproach upon those who deny Christ's deity: "If any one says that the Lord is a mere man, he is a Jew, a murderer of Christ." In the spurious (but ancient) *Epistle to the Philippians,* chapter 14 *(ANF* 1:119), *we* read: "If any one celebrates the passover along with the Jews, or receives the emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those that killed the Lord and His apostles. "

Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 100-165) plays the same theme of Jewish liability in his *First Apology* "Jesus Christ stretched forth His hands, being crucified by the Jews" (ch. 35, *ANF* 1:174). "And that all these things happened to Christ at the hands of the Jews, you can ascertain" (ch. 38, *ANF* 1:175). In his *Dialogue with Trypho,* chapter 72 *(ANF* 1:235), he writes: "the Jews deliberated about the Christ Himself, to crucify and put Him to death."

Irenaeus (c. 130-202) concurs in his *Against Heresies,* when he says of the Jews: "[God] sent in Jesus, whom they crucified and God raised up" (3: 12:2, *ANF* 1:430), and "To the Jews, indeed, they proclaimed that the Jesus who was crucified by them was the Son of

15. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF],* 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [late 19th c.] 1975).

God (3:12:13, *ANF* 1:435).

Other Church fathers return to this theme. We list them along with the references from *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*:

Melito of Sardis (d. A.D. 190): (*ANF* 8:757ff., 760).

Tertullian (A.D. 160-220):

Apology, chapters 21 (*ANF* 3:34ff.) and 26 (*ANF* 3:40).
On Idolatry, chapter 7 *(ANF 3:64).*
An Answer to the Jews, chapters 9 *(ANF 3: 160)* and 13 *(ANF 3: 171).*
Against Martin, 3:6 *(ANF* 3:325ff.), 3:23 *(ANF* 3:341), 5:15 *(ANF* 3:462).

Hippolytus (c. A.D. 170-236):

Treatise on *Christ and Anti-christ*, chapters 30 *(ANF* 5:210) and 57 (*ANF* 5:216).
Expository Treatise Against the Jews, chapters 1, 2 *(ANF 5:219),* and 7 (*ANF* 5:220).
Against Noetus, chapter 18 (*ANF 5:230).*
Discourse on the End of the World (spurious; date unknown), chapters 1 *(ANF* 5:242) and 40 *(ANF* 5:252).

Cyprian (c. A.D. 195-258): *Treatises*, 9:7 *(ANF* 5:486); 10:5 *(ANF* 5:492); Introduction to *Treatise 12 (ANF* 5:507); *12:2:14* (*ANF* 5:521); 12:2:20 *(ANF* 5:524).

Lactantius (c. 240-320):

Divine Institutes, 4:18 (*ANF 7: 121).*
Epitome of the Divine Institutes, chapter 46 *(ANF 7:241).*
On the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died, chapter 2 *(ANF 7:301).*

Other evidences from early Church tradition include references in the following works:

The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, 5:3:18 (ANF 7:447).
Acts and Martyrdom of St. Matthew the Apostle (ANF 8:530).
Acts of the Holy Apostle Thaddaeus (ANF 8:559).
Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian (ANF 8:560ff.).
Revelation of Paul (ANF 8:581).
Agbar the King and Addaeus the Apostle (ANF 8:656).
The Teaching of Addaeus the Apostle (ANF 8:659,662, 664).
The Teaching of the Apostles (ANF 8:670).
The Teaching of Simon Cephas (ANF 8:675).
Moses of Chorine, chapter 33 *(ANF* 8:705ff.).
A Letter of Mara (*ANF 8:737).*

Clearly, the Judgment-Coming of Christ upon "those who pierced Him," was to be upon the Jews, according to the repeated and uniform witness both of the New Testament and of early Church history. As Chilton observes: "Verse 7 [i.e., of Revelation 1] announces the theme of the book, which is not the Second Coming of Christ, but rather the Coming of Christ in judgment upon Israel, in order to establish the Church as the new Kingdom." [16] Clarke argues for an early date for Revelation based on Revelation 1:7: "By this the *Jewish people* are most evidently intended, and therefore the whole verse may be understood as predicting the destruction of the Jews; and is a presumptive proof that the Apocalypse was written *before* the final overthrow of the Jewish state. [17]

'<The Tribes of the Earth"

This view is reinforced in the Revelation 1:7 passage when it speaks of the mourning of "the tribes of the earth. " The Greek word for "tribe" is φυλή, which in Scripture most. frequently refers to the Jewish tribes. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes that the Septuagint "with few exceptions . . . has φυλή, so that this becomes a freed term for the tribal system of Israel." [18] The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* agrees, noting that with few exceptions φυλή "refer[s] exclusively to the tribes of Israel." [19] The reference to the "tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5 definitely carries that connotation. The term obviously has that import in Revelation 7:4ff., where it is used of each of the specifically named Twelve Tribes. The same must be true in Revelation 21:12, where John refers to "the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. " Of course, where the term is found in connection with "*every* kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation"

16. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 64.

17. Adam Clarke, Clark/s *Commentary*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon [c. 1823] rep. n.d.) 6:971.

18. Christian Maurer, "φυλή," Gerhard Kittle and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 9:246.

19. Burton Scott Easton, "Tribe," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929) 43010. It should be noted, in addition, that both the Arndt-Gingrich and the Thayer Greek lexicons list "tribe", as in Israel, as their first lexical entries. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 876; Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New* York: American, 1889), p. 660.

in Revelation, such would not be the exclusive reference (cf. Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6).

"The Land"

In addition, the Greek word for "earth" in Revelation 1:7 is *γῆ*, which most usually means either: (1) "earth, globe" or (2) "land."[20] Thus, upon purely lexical considerations, the term can be understood as designating the Promised Land. As a matter of fact, literal translations of the Scripture lean in this direction. Robert Young's *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* translates it: "Lo, he cloth come with the clouds, and see him shall every eye, even those who did pierce him, and wail because of him shall all the tribes of the land. Yes! Amen!"[21] Marshall's *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* concurs: "Behold he comes with the clouds, and will see him every eye and [those] who him pierced, and will wail over him all the tribes of the land. Yes, amen."[22]

Desprez's comments on this matter are most helpful:

> The words *ἡ γῆ*, are not infrequently used in the Apocalypse in connection with other clauses which qualify their meaning, making it evident that no particular land is pointed out, but earth generally. . . . But the words in question are sometimes found qualified by governing considerations which define and determine their meaning, and *this is always the case*, when they are found in connection with the governing clauses "they that dwell," *οἱ κατοικοῦντες*. Then they have, and can have, only one meaning; then they refer only to one land and to one people, and this land and this people must be the land and the people of Judea.[23]

The significance of this translation of *ἡ γῆ* can be discerned from spiritual-cultural situations, such as noted by Edersheim: "For, to the Rabbis the precise limits of Palestine were chiefly interesting so far as they affected the religious obligations or privileges of a district.

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20. See Arndt and Gingrich, p. 156; Thayer, pp. 114-115. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1937), p. 91.

21. Robert Young, *The* New *Testament in Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1898] rep.n.d.), p. 167.

22. Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 956.

23. P. S. Desprez, *The Apocalypse Fulfilled*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1855), pp. 12-13.

And in this respect the fact that a city was in heathen possession exercised a decisive influence. Thus the environs of Ascalon, the wall of Caesarea, and that of Acco, were reckoned within the boundaries of Palestine, though the cities themselves were not. Indeed, viewing the question from this point, Palestine was to the Rabbis simply 'the land,' all other countries being summed up under the designation of 'outside the land.' "[24]

That such is the referent in Revelation 1:7 seems to be additionally indicated by the fact that the verse is a blending of Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. The Zechariah 12:10 passage indisputably refers to the land of Israel: "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born. In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadnmmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land will mourn, every family by itself."

Furthermore, in Jesus' teaching there is a recurring emphasis upon the culpability of the generation of Jews then living. In Matthew 23 He calls down a seven-fold woe upon the scribes and Pharisees, those who "sit in the chair of Moses" (Matt. 23:2). In this woeful passage He distinctly and clearly warns (Matt. 23:32-38):

> Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, *that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth,* from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. *Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation. O* Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!

24. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1876] 1972), p. 14.

Christ then goes on to describe the desolation of Israel's "house" (temple) in Matthew 24. In Matthew 24:1-2 He clearly and distinctly makes reference to the destruction of the Temple. And in the following context He expands on this as involving the "abomination of desolation" in the Temple (v. 15) and the "great tribulation" (v. 21), which signify "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (v. 30). These events are said to be coming upon "this generation" (v. 34), i.e., *the very generation which rejected and "pierced" Him. That generation* was to be destroyed in His Judgment-Coming. And we know as a matter of indisputable historical fact that the Temple was destroyed by Titus's August, A.D. 70, siege of it.[25] Hence, as Jesus bears His cross to Calvary He exhorts the "daughters of Jerusalem" to weep for themselves because of the coming j udgment (Luke 23:28-31; cp. Rev. 6:16).

It is an interesting fact noted by a number of commentators that John's Gospel is the only Gospel that does not contain the Olivet Discourse, and that it would seem John's Revelation served as His exposition of the Discourse.[26] Schaff has written that: "It is the one and only prophetic book, but based upon the discourses of our Lord on the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, and his second advent (Matt. ch. 24). "2[7] Thomas Dehany Bernard argues quite rigorously in this vein:

> And more particularly it is to be noticed, that this book [i.e., Revelation] bears the same relation to the last discourse in St. Matthew, which the Epistles bear to the last discourse in St. John. . . . Sitting on the Mount of Olives with Jerusalem spread before him, and questioned as to the sign of his coming and of the winding up of the age, he gave the outlines of a prophetic history, which contained the

25. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 7:1:1.

26. Even among those who do not see Revelation as John's record of the Olivet Discourse, there are those who see Revelation as getting its framework from the apocalyptic sections of the Synoptic Gospels, e.g., Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Book of Revelation*, 4th ed. (New York: Scribners, 1941), p. 30. Charles contends that John had the Synoptic manuscripts before him at the time (R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920] 1 :lxxxiii). Others have pointed out that Charles's arguments are unconvincing: Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd cd. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 956; J. Oman, *The Book of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press, 1923), p. 29; and L. A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Amsterdam: Kampen, 1965), *passim.*

27. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:826.

> substance, bore the character, and must rule the interpretation, of the later and larger revelation.[28]

Farrar speaks of Revelation as John's "stormy comment upon the great discourse of our Lord on 01ivet."[29] J. Stuart Russell puts the matter as strongly as any commentator:

> And here we find an explanation of what must have struck most thoughtful readers of the evangelic history as extremely singular, namely, the total absence in the Fourth Gospel of that which occupies so conspicuous a place in the Synoptical Gospels, – the great prophecy of our Lord on the Mount of Olives. The silence of, St. John in his gospel is the more remarkable in that he was one of the four favoured disciples who listened to that discourse; yet, in his gospel we find no trace of it whatever. . . . But the difficulty is explained if it should be found that *the Apocalypse is nothing else than a transfigured form oft/u prophecy on the Mount of Olives.*[30]

If, as seems likely, Revelation is indeed John's exposition of the Olivet Discourse, we must remember that in the delivery of the Discourse the Lord emphasized that it focused on Israel (Matt. 24:1, 2, 15-16; cp. Matt. 23:32ff.) and was to occur in His generation (Matt. 24:34).

Conclusion

With these several contextual indicators before us, it would seem certain that the theme of Revelation deals with Christ's Judgment-Coming *upon the generation of those Jews who crucified Him.* As Desprez noted of this theme verse in conjunction with the temporal expectations of the book: "NO *scriptural statement is capable of more decided proof than that the coming of Christ is the destruction of Jerusalem, and the close of the Jewish dispensation."*[31] Such being the case, only a pre-A.D. 70 date could be expected, for what event subsequent to the A.D. 70 destruction of the Temple parallels the magnitude and covenantal significance of this event? Surely the destruction of the Jewish Temple (accomplished now for over 1900 years) and the gruesome Jewish

28. Bernard, *Progress of Doctrine,* p. 201.

29. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York: Cassell, 1884), p. 428.

30. Russell, *Parousia,* p. *374,*

31. Desprez, *Apocalypse,* p. 9 (emphasis in original).

War with Rome *must* be in view here. In terms of Jewish calamity and woe, what events near the reign of Domitian could equal those that transpired just after Nero's reign?

This evidence is all the more compelling when, in the next chapter, we consider it in terms of the temporal expectation of the author.

9

THE TEMPORAL EXPECTATION OF THE AUTHOR

One of the most helpful interpretive clues in Revelation is at the same time both one of the most generally overlooked among lay students of Scripture and one of the most radically reinterpreted by evangelical scholars. This clue is the *contemporary expectation of the author* regarding the fulfillment of the prophecies. John clearly expects the *soon* fulfillment of his prophecy.

The Prominence of the Temporal Expectation

This expectation is emphasized in a variety of ways: by strategic placement, frequent repetition, and careful variation. The temporal expectation is strategically placed in that it appears three times in the opening, introductory chapter (Rev. 1:1, 3, 19) and four times in the final, concluding chapter (Rev. 22:6, 7, 12, 20). Its appearance in both of these chapters is significant because these chapters bracket the highly wrought drama of the prophetic body of the book contained in the section from Revelation 4:1 through 22:6. These portions of Revelation in which the time indicators are embedded are generally of a more historical than prophetical character.

The temporal expectation receives frequent repetition in that it occurs not only seven times in the opening and closing chapters, but at least three times in the letters in chapters two and three (Rev. 2:16; 3:10).[1]

This expectation is also varied in its manner of expression, almost as if to avoid any potential confusion as to the specificity of its meaning. Its variation revolves among three word groups. We will

1. In addition, the present tense possibly should be so understood in Revelation 1:7; 2:5.

survey these various expressions in order to prepare for our primary arguments for the early date of Revelation that are yet to come. Our survey will be grouped according to similarities of expression.

Verses Using the *Τάχος* Word Group

Revelation 1:1

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must *shortly* take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John.

Revelation 2:16

"Repent therefore; or else I am coming to you *quickly*, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth."

Revelation 3:11

"I am coming *quickly*; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown."

Revelation 22:6

And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must *shortly* take place.

Revelation 22:7, 12,20

"And behold, I am coming *quickly*. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

"Behold, I am coming *quickly*, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. "

"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming *quickly*." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

A cursory reading of the passages before us unavoidably leads even the casual reader to conclude that John expected the fulfillment of the prophecies within a very short period of time following his writing. The crucial word in the statement in the opening verse, for instance, is "shortly."

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2. These expressions of temporal expectation are not the only internal indicators of time in Revelation. There are many others (e.g., Rev. 6:10, 11, 17; 7:14 [present participle]; 8:13; 10:6; 11:14, 17; etc.). However, these are strategically placed before and after the body of the dramatic-symbolic prophecies section and thus determine the time indications of those sections.

Inadequate Views

Unfortunately, however, many commentators do not see the issue as being so apparent. Dispensationalist scholar John Walvoord understands Revelation's opening comment thus: "That which Daniel declared would occur 'in the latter days' is here described as 'shortly' (Gr. *en tachei*), that is, 'quickly or suddenly coming to pass,' indicating a rapidity of execution after the beginning takes place. The idea is not that the event may occur soon, but that when it does, it will be sudden (cf. Luke 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rem. 16:20). A similar word, *tackys*, is translated 'quickly' seven times in Revelation."3 Of the Revelation 22 reference Walvoord notes: "The descriptive phrase 'shortly be done' literally translated is 'what it is necessary to do quickly.' Here the noun is used. In verse 7, the adverb of the same root is translated 'quickly.' The thought seems to be that when the action comes, it will be sudden. Also it is to be regarded as impending as if it is meant to be fulfilled at any time. In either case, it constitutes a message of warning that those who believe should be alert. From the stand-point of the agelong divine program, the events of the age were impending even at the time John wrote this message though some of them were thousands of years future."4

Fellow premillennialist (though non-dispensationalist) scholar Robert Mounce concurs with Walvoord's main point: "John writes

3. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 35. It is terribly interesting that "the latter days" are said to have come already in the New Testament era: Heb. 1:1,2, 9:26; 1 Cor. 10:11; Acts 2:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18. What Daniel is commanded to "seal up" – because it looks into the distant future (Dan. 8:26) –John is commanded to "not seal up" because "the time is near" (Rev. 22:10). It has been pointed out by several evangelical scholars that also contained in Daniel is an important prophecy which seems to tie the close of the canon and all prophetic revelation to the A.D. 70 destruction of the temple. Daniel 9:24, 26 reads: "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. . . . After the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood." This seventy weeks of years period is widely held among conservative scholars to reach to the First Advent of Christ. The usefulness of this passage is enhanced by the fact that Christ draws from it in His Olivet Discourse (cf. Matt. 2415) which is clearly related to the A.D. 70 destruction of the Temple (cf. Matt. 241-2). This argument deserves greater explication, but may lead us afield from our primary concern: Revelation.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 333.

that these events which constitute the revelation must take place shortly. That more than 1900 years of church history have passed and the end is not yet poses a problem for some. One solution is to understand 'shortly' in the sense of suddenly, or without delay once the appointed time arrives. Another approach is to interpret it in terms of the certainty of the events in question. Of little help is the suggestion that John may be employing the formula of 2 Peter 3:8 ('with the Lord one day is as a thousand years'). . . . The most satisfying solution is to take the word in a straight-forward sense, remembering that in the prophetic outlook the end is always imminent."5

Morns (who probably would be classed as an amillennialist) agrees with the premillennialist on this matter, although he takes the route that seems to Mounce to be "of little help": "*Shortly* is not defined. . . . This could mean that the fulfillment is expected in the very near future. . . . But speedily has a reference to His time not ours. With Him one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (2 Pet. iii. 8). It is also possible that the term should be understood as 'suddenly,' i.e., not so much 'soon' as 'without delay when the time comes.'"6

Vincent's work differs little from the type suggested by Morris's line of thought: "Expressions like this must be understood, not according to human measurement of time, but rather as in 2 Pet. iii. 8. The idea is, before long, as time is computed by God."7 Hoeksema, an amillennialist, agrees when he writes of Revelation 1:1 that "we must remember . . . that God's measure of time differs from ours."8 Swete, a postmillennialist, writes that "*ἐν τάχει* . . . must be inter-

5. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 64-65. Later, however, Mounce makes an admission based on his view that must be pair-did to a conservative biblical scholar "It is true that history has shown that 'the things which must shortly come to pass' (1: 1) have taken longer than John expected" (p. 243). Were not bis numerous expectations recorded in infallible Holy Writ? Were they merely the expectations of "John the enthusiast," or were they not the expectations of 'John the divinely inspired prophet" (see Rev. 1:1; 22:6, 20)? These were not incidental to his work, but repetitively emphatic in it.

6. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 45.

7. Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. *2: The Writings of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1887] 1985), p. 407.

8. Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1969), p. 9.

preted here and in xxii. 6 relatively to Divine measurements of time."[9]

The Matter of Translation

It is a remarkable fact that although these (and numerous other) scholars proffer such understandings of the statement, modern translations almost universally read as if John's expectation was for a soon eventuation of the prophecies. Notice the following translations of the crucial portion of Revelation 1:1:

"must shortly take place"
New American Standard Bible
New King James Version

"must shortly come to pass"
American Standard Version
The New Testament in Modern Speech, by R. F. Weymouth

"must soon take place"
Revised Standard Version
New International Version

"must shortly happen"
New English Bible

"must very soon take place"
The New Testament in Modem English, by J. B. Phillips
The New Testament in the Language of the People, by Charles B. Williams

"what must come to pass very soon"
The Holy Bible: A New Translation, by James Moffatt

"must shortly and speedily come to pass"
Amplified Bible

"what must happen very soon"
Today's English Version

9. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. 2.

"what must happen soon"
New *Testament in the Language of Today,*
by William F. Beck

The translation under question (i.e., in Revelation 1:1, although the other references cited should be kept in mind, as well) has to do with the proper interpretation of the Greek phrase *ἐν τάχει. Τάχει* is the dative singular of the noun *τάχος*. Lexicographers seem to be universally agreed with the translators as to the meaning of the word. According to the Arndt and Gingrich *Lexicon*,[10] *τάχος* is used in the Septuagint (and certain non-canonical writings) to mean "speed, quickness, swiftness, haste." In the prepositional phrase *ἐν τάχει*, the word is used adverbially in the Septuagint and Josephus to mean "quickly, at once, without delay." The New Testament uses *τάχος* in this manner, says Arndt and Gingrich, in Acts 10:33;12:7; 17:15; 22:18. In Luke 18:8; Remans 16:20; 1 Timothy 3:14; Revelation 1:1; and 22:6 this lexicon translates it "soon, in a short time. " The various entries proffered at the *τάχος* entry by Thayer[11] include: "quickness, speed" and "quickly, shortly, speedily, soon." Thayer lists Revelation 1:1 and 22:6 with the "speedily, soon" entries. Abbott-Smith concurs; for the Revelation 1:1 and 22:6 texts he offers: "quickly, speedily, soon."[12] Hort translates it "shortly, soon."[13] Noted Greek scholar and church historian Kurt Aland agrees, when he comments on the word as it is used in Revelation 22:12:

> In the original text, the Greek word used is *ταχύ*, and this does not mean "soon," in the sense of "sometime," but rather "now," "immediately." Therefore, we must understand Rev. 22:12 in this way: "I am coming now, bringing my recompense." The concluding word of Rev. 22:20 is: "He who testifies to these things says, 'surely I am coming soon.'" Here we again find the word *ταχύ*, so this means: I am coming quickly, immediately. This is followed by the prayer: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" . . . The Apocalypse expresses the fervent wait-

10. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (Chicago University of Chicago, 1957), pp. 814-815.

11. Joseph Henry Thayer, cd., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New* York: American Book, 1889), p. 616.

12. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament,* 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1950), p. 441.

13. J. F. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-HI* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. 6.

> ing for the end within the circles in which the writer lived — not an expectation that will happen at some unknown point X in time (just to repeat this), but one in the immediate present. [14]

It would seem that only an interpretive a *priori* against the translation of the noted lexicographers and modern translations could account for the views of the commentators cited above.

The Matter of the "Sitz im Leben"

The deducible internal *sitz im Leben* ("situation in life") of the recipients of Revelation also demands the maintenance of the preponderate scholarly lexical and translational consensus. John writes to seven contemporary historical churches (Rev. 1:11) facing very real serious, repeated, and intensifying threats (Rev. 2-3). He speaks of his own present enduring of "the tribulation" with them (Rev. 1:9). He notes with concern the expectant cry from the altar: "How long, O Lord?" (Rev. 6:10). Walvoord's view – that when Jesus eventually comes He will come with great rapidity — would have offered no consolation to these persecuted saints. To interpret this passage to mean that some two or three thousand years in the future Jesus will come with great rapidity would be a mockery of their historical circumstances. Surely "this [ἐν τάχει] is the hinge and staple of the book. When the advent of Jesus is hailed as a relief, it is no consolation to say that the relief will come suddenly; sudden or not, it must come soon (v. 7), if it is to be of any service."[15]

Mounce's second possibility – i.e., of the event's certainty of occurrence — has little to commend it. After all, the certainty of Revelation's eventuation is well-taken care of by the expression δεῖ γενέσθαι ("must occur"). A simple future tense ("will occur") would have served well enough to insure the satisfaction of certainty. If certainty of eventuation was all that was being urged, why repeatedly employ the use of a term – in addition to δεῖ γενέσθαι ! — that could generate false expectations? Such a question becomes all the more crucial in light of the other similar word groups employed, as will be shown shortly.

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14. Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Threshold of the Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), p. 88.

15. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament*, *vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 335.

Mounce's third possibility (endorsed by Swete, Morris, Hoeksema, Vincent, and others) is just as implausible, and falters on the same grounds. What mockery of anguished pain and mental suffering to write to persecuted saints: "Help is on the way in God's time – which may be a couple of thousand years or more away. " Swete even observed that "the Coming is postponed indefinitely, though the old watchword, *'Ιδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ*, still rings in our ears. " [16] Such would be a "be thou warm and filled" comfort of little help to these churches.

We will not deal as lengthily with the following two groups in that most of the arguments for the former group readily apply to the remaining ones. Nevertheless, to demonstrate the variation and repetition of the theme, it is necessary to at least proffer a brief survey of them.

Verses Using the *'Εγγύς* Word Group

Revelation 1:3

> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of' the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is mar.

Revelation 22:10

> And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is mar."

All translations consulted on these verses concurred in either the translation "at hand" or "near." [17] The crucial word in these passages is *ἐγγύς* (pronounced "engus"), which is an adverb of time formed from two words: *ἐν* ("in, at") and *γυῖον* ("limb, hand"). Hence the meaning is literally "at hand." The Arndt and Gingrich *Lexicon* offers one word, "near," as the meaning.[18] Thayer expands on the idea of the word: "of Time; concerning things imminent and soon to come to pass." [19] He lists Revelation 1:3 and 22:10 in his series of examples. The word is used frequently of chronologically near events, such as approaching summer (Matt. 24:32), the Passover (Matt. 26: 18; John 2:13; 11:55), the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:2), etc.

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16. Swete, Revelation, p. cv.

17. See the translations consulted above.

18. Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 213.

19. Thayer, *Lexicon*, p. 164.

How could events related to the collapse of the Roman Empire two or three hundred years in the future be considered "at hand," as per Swete, Barnes, and others? Several generations of these Christians would have waxed and waned over such a period. Even more difficult to understand is how events two or three *thousand* years in the future could be considered "at hand," as per Mounce, Walvoord, and others. How could such events so remotely stretched out into the future be "at hand"? But if the expected events were to occur within a period of from one to five years — as in the case with Revelation if the book were written prior to A.D. 70 – then all becomes clear.

Verses Using the *Μέλλω* Word Group

Revelation 1:19

> "Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which *shall take* place after these things. "

Revelation 3:10

> "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is *about to* come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth."

Unfortunately, none of the major translations cited above translates Revelation 1:19 in a literal fashion. Although, interestingly, several do translate the same verb in a more literal fashion when it appears in Revelation 3:10.20 Berry's *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament,* Young's *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible,* and Marshall's *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament,* however, are quite literal in both instances.[21] The relevant phrases read: "the things which are about to occur" (Rev. 1: 19) and "being about to come" (Rev. 3:10).

Certainly it is true that the verb *μέλλω* can indicate simply "destined," or it can be employed in a weakened sense as a periphrasis for the future tense. Nevertheless, when used with the aorist infinitive — as in Revelation 1:19 — the word's preponderate usage

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20. See AV, NASB, Weymouth, and Williams.

21. George Ricker Berry, The *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [n.d.] rep. 1961), pp. 626-629; Robert Young, *The* New *Testament in Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1898] rep. n.d.), p. 168; Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), pp. 959, 966; and Jay P. Green, Sr., *The Interlinear Bible,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), p. 927.

and preferred meaning is: "be on the point of, be about to."[22] The same is true when the word is used with the present infinitive, as in Rev. 3:10.[23] The basic meaning in both Thayer and Abbott-Smith is: "to be about to. "[24] Indeed, "*Μέλλειν* with the infinitive expresses imminence (like the future) ."[25]

All of this is particularly significant when the contexts of these two occurrences of *μέλλω* in Revelation are considered: the words appear in near proximity with statements made up of the two other word groups indicating "nearness." Revelation 1:19 is preceded by Revelation 1:1 and 1:3 (which contain representatives of both the *τάχος* and *ἐγγύς* word groups). Revelation 3:10 is followed by Revelation 3:11 (which contains a representative of the τάχος word group). Clearly, then, the Revelation 1:19 and 3:10 references hold forth an excited expectation of soon occurrence.[26]

The Significance of **the** Temporal Expectation

The question that quite naturally arises from this vivid and imminent expectation is: What historical era best accounts for events of the magnitude expected by John in Revelation? A magnitude that is so covenantally and redemptively significant as to be, in an important and dramatic sense, a "coming" of Christ (Rev. 1:7; 2:5, 16, 25; 3:3, 11, 20; 16: 15; 22:7, 12, 20)? Is there an era that could represent such a "coming" and that lies *before* the late date and *after* the early date? If so, then, in light of the clear imminent expectation of Revelation, evangelical scholarship – which rightly disdains naturalistic *ex eventu* prophecy — should be compelled to accept an early date on the basis of Revelation's integrity and self-witness.

We must understand that Revelation calls for these imminent events to come upon the Jews (i.e., "those who pierced Him," Rev.

22. Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 502 (lb).

23. *Ibid.*, p. *502* (1c).

24. Thayer, *Lexicon*, p. *396;* Abbott-Smith, *Lexicon*, p. 282.

25. F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), p. 181 (§ 356).

26. Furthermore, the expectation of John is not unique to Revelation. Indeed, throughout the New Testament corpus there are frequent anticipatory references to expectations of some dramatic occurrences of prophetic and redemptive significance. See Mark 9:1; Matt. 23:32-36; 24:21-34; 26:64; Rem. 13:11, 12; 16:20; I Cor. 7:29-31, 26; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 2:16; Heb. 1025, 37; James 5:8,9; 1 Pet. 45, 7; 1 John 2:17, 18.

1:7; see also: Rev. 2:9; 3:9), the Church (cf. Rev. 1:9; 2:9-10, 16; 3:2), and the Roman Empire27 (Rev. 3:10). Thus, the book has reference to the three divisions of mankind .28 That the decades of the A.D. 60s best meet up to the requirements is evident from a number of considerations.

First, the Jewish War of A.D. 67-70 witnessed the deaths of tens of thousands of the Jews in Judea, and the enslavement of thousands upon thousands more.29 This war eventuated in the final and complete destruction of the Temple and of the entire sacrificial system for Israel, as well as the total devastation of Jerusalem itself This destruction was beyond comparison according to Josephus: "Whereas the war which the Jews made with the Remans bath been the greatest of all those, not only that have been in our times, but, in a manner, of those that ever were heard of; both of those wherein cities have fought against cities, or nations against nations. . . . Accordingly it appears to me, that the misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to these of the Jews, are not so considerable as they were. "3° No later era witnesses any events that even approach the fundamental covenantal significance of this calamity.

Such an analysis of the covenantal and redemptive import of the collapse of the Jewish order is demanded by the nature of Christianity (cf. the Epistle to the Hebrews) and the nature of the final, New Covenant (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11 :25). In an important sense John "did not die till Christ had returned, in that sense of the 'close of the aeon' to which His own words and that of His Apostles often

27. The Greek word translated "world" in Revelation 3:10 is *οἰκουμένη*, which is generally understood to represent the civilized world, or the Roman Empire. See Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 564: "the Roman Empire (which, in the exaggerated language commonly used in ref. to the emperors, was equal to the whole world. . .) ." Cp. Luke 2:1.

28. The three-fold division of the race – pagan, Jew, Christian – is seen in the Scriptural record at 1 Cor. 10:32. Tertullian also speaks at length of such a division, *To the Nations* 1:8.

29. Josephus records more than 1,100,000 were slain, although most historians deem the figure to be inflated, cf. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 6:9:3.

30. Josephus, *Wars*, Preface Sec. 1 and Sec. 4. Mosheim wrote of this calamity "Throughout the whole history of the human race, we meet with but few, if any, instances of slaughter and devastation at all to be compared with this" (John Laurence *von* Mosheim, *Historical Commentaries on the State of Christianity [New* York: Converse, 1854] 1:125).

point. . . . The Apocalypse was written before he had witnessed the coming of Christ and the close of the Old Dispensation, in the mighty catastrophe which, by the voice of God in history, abrogated all but the moral precepts which had been uttered by the voice of God on Sinai."[31]

Second, the first persecution of Christianity by Imperial Rome occurred from A.D. 64 to A.D. 68 (ending at the death of Nero). This persecution was not only the first and one of the most severe,[32] but it was the one that brought about the deaths of at least two of Christianity's greatest leaders: Peter and Paul. Furthermore, with the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, Christianity would be clearly distinguished forever from Judaism.[33]

Third, from June, A.D. 68, through December, A.D. 69, the Roman Empire suffered through a gruesome and severe Civil War that almost brought the Empire down, and that had reverberations throughout the Empire. This era witnessed the remarkable and unique "Year of Four Emperors" (A.D. 68-69): Nero committed suicide in June, A.D. 68, at the outbreak of civil revolt. Galba from Spain declared himself emperor and was accepted as such by the Praetorian Guard and Senate. In January, A.D. 69, the Praetorians switched their allegiance to Otho, and slew Galba. The Rhine armies then proclaimed Vitellius emperor. His armies defeated Otho's forces at Bedriacum. Upon Otho's suicide on April 17, A.D. 69, Vitellius was declared emperor. Later the Eastern provinces declared Vespasian emperor. Vespasian then took Rome in a destructive and bloody battle, which saw the death of Vitellius on December 20, A.D. 69.[34]

Nothing in or around Domitian's era had anywhere near the dramatic significance of these events for all three of these cultures. Regarding the Jews, the Temple was already gone and, since Vespasian, the Jews throughout the Empire had already been forced to

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31. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York Cassell, 1884), pp. 404,406.

32. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:386.

33. To be discussed much more fully in Chapter 13.

34. For a full historical account see Tacitus's writings. For a brief summary see N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), p. 930; or William L. Langer, cd., *An Encyclopaedia of World History*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), p. 121.

pay the Didrachma (known as the "Jewish Tax"), which was used to build the pagan temple Jupiter Capitolina. Regarding Christianity, the persecution of Domitian (if it did, in fact, occur)[35] was the second persecution of Christianity, was not as severe or long-lasting, and did not result in the death of any inspired apostle. Regarding Rome, although Domitian was assassinated, the impact on the Empire was negligible in that a relatively orderly transfer of power followed.

Conclusion

Thus, it would seem that our first two considerations – i.e., the theme and the expectation of Revelation – powerfully suggest the *prima facie* plausibility of a pre-A.D. 70 writing of Revelation. A preterist approach to Revelation seems to be demanded by both the thematic statement and the temporal expectation of the author. Unfortunately, evangelical scholarship in the last fifty years has been hesitant to adopt a preterist hermeneutic. This has left the impression — at least among many lay students — that preterism is intrinsically liberal.

Now we must admit that "some variant of this view [i.e., preterism] is adopted by most modern [read: liberal] scholars. "[36] Nevertheless, we must recognize that there is what J. W. Roberts calls "left wing" and "right wing" camps in the preterist school .37 Thus, contrary to some evangelical complaints,[38] there is clearly "a radical difference between those Preterists who acknowledge a real prophecy and permanent truth in the book, and the rationalistic Preterists who regard it as a dream of a visionary which was falsified by events."[39] The preterist approach to Revelation must be scrutinized in terms of its own intrinsic merits, irrespective of the widespread employment of the system among radical scholars.

35. See Chapter 17.
36. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 17.
37. J. W. Roberts, *The Revelation to John* (Austin, TX: Sweet, 1974), pp. 15, 16.
38. E.g., George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1972), p. 11.
39. Schaff, *History 1:837-838.*

10

THE IDENTITY OF THE SIXTH KING

We find an extremely important chronology indicator in Revelation 17 where the "sixth king" is mentioned. The relevant portion of the text containing the reference to the sixth king is in Revelation 17:3,6-13:

> And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. . . . And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me, "Why do you wonder? I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction."

The particularly significant statement in this section is found in verses 9 and 10: "Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and *they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is,* the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while."

The **Hermeneutical** Problem

Unfortunately, an alleged difficulty seems to plague interpreters

in regard to this passage. The problem is that John introduces the passage in such a way as to appear to suggest the exceeding difficulty of the interpretation of the matter. After the vision is shown to (Rev. 17: 1) and seen by (Rev. 17:3) John, the angel speaking to him says (v. 9a): "Here is the mind which has wisdom" (the Greek of the statement is: *ὧδε ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἔχων σοφίαν*. Then follows our text. Despite the fact that there are no lexically difficult words involved, this phrase has generated extensive debate among commentators.

We will consider the reservations of two commentators by way of illustration of the false perceptions regarding the alleged interpretive problem. Regarding the matter, dispensationalist Walvoord notes: "The explanation of the beast introduced by the unusual phrase 'here is the mind which bath wisdom' anticipates the difficulty and complexity of the revelation to follow. The reader is warned that spiritual wisdom is required to understand that which is unfolded."] Postmillennialist H. B. Swete urges caution on the same basis: "What is to follow will put to the proof the spiritual discernment of the hearer or reader. . . . As Arethas points out, the wisdom which is demanded is a higher gift than ordinary intelligence. . . . The interpretation now begins, but (as the reader has been warned) it is itself an enigma, for which more than one solution may be found."2

Despite the asseverations of these commentators, it would seem that those who allege that the phrase introduces an ambiguity are in essence turning the statement on its head. In point of fact, the context is extremely clear: the express purpose of the statement is to provide an *elucidation* of the matter. Let us consider the situation carefully.

In verses 1-6 of Revelation 17, one of the seven angels appears to John for the purpose of showing him the judgment of the "great harlot" (v. 1). When the angel "carried" him "away in the Spirit," John "saw" the woman on the beast (v. 3). This was a revelatory vision-experience, such as the opening verse of Revelation indicated John would receive (Rev. 1:1, "signified"). By definition revelatory visions are symbolic representations of prophetic truths or events. The visions as such are the more difficult portions of Revelation, by

1. John F. Walvoord, *The* Revelation *of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 250.

2. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), pp. 219-220.

the very nature of the case. Indeed, in the very situation before us, John expresses his own alarm and dismay at the meaning of the vision: "And when I saw her, I wondered greatly" (v. 6). The verb (*θαυμάζω*, "1 wonder") and noun (*θαῦμα*, "wonderment, amazement") are united here to indicate intensity of confused amazement. This expression of intense wonder is augmented by the addition of the comparative, *μέγα* ("great"). Literally John says: "I wondered with great wonder." Furthermore, the vision itself is called a "mystery" (*μυστήριον*) by the angel (v. 7).

Nevertheless, we are not left to our own ingenuity to interpret the mysterious vision. The angel expressly tells John: "Why do you wonder? I shall *tell you* the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and ten horns" (v. 8). That which *follows,* then, is the *angelic exposition of the vision.* Thus, that which is stated in verses 9 and 10 occurs in the expository rather than in the visionary portion of the passage. Earlier in the passage when the angel took John to "see" the vision (v. 1), the language used was fitted for symbolic visual experience: "I will show" (*δείξω*, from *δεικνῡμι*). But in verse 7 the language is expository: "I will tell you" (ἐρῶ, the future of *λέγω*). It indicates that the following is given in explanation of the vision. As such, the passage is similar to John's experience in Revelation 7:9 and 13, 14: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands. . . . And one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?' And I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" Here in Revelation 7 John has an *explanation* provided him for that which he saw. Still further, we must note that this passage differs greatly from a later one where John is actually forbidden to write something that he heard (Rev. 10:4). There, in Revelation 10:4, the meaning was not to be granted to the recipients of Revelation, contrary to the stated purposes in Revelation 7 and 17.

Consequently, as we approach Revelation 17:9 and 10, we should not expect to become more perplexed. Actually, the difficulty that

requires wisdom is due to the fact that the visual representation being elucidated has a *two-fold* referent: "The seven heads are [1] seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are [2] seven kings" (w. 9-10a). This feature would doubtless escape the interpreter without the angelic explication. It would appear, then, that the expression "here is the mind which has wisdom" is introducing the *interpretation* of a vision so that he who follows the angelic interpretation has wisdom. To argue that the following statements become more difficult would go contrary to the stated purpose of the angelic explanation. This leads us to our next consideration, which gives us important information for the determination of the date of Revelation.

The Seven Hills

The first aspect of the historical allusion to note in these expositional verses is the reference to the *place* where the woman sits. The text unambiguously states: "The seven heads are *seven* mountains on which the woman sits." Here is an area described geographically as having "seven mountains." Perhaps no point is more obvious in Revelation than this one: *Rome* is symbolized here by the seven mountains. *Rome* is the one city in history that has been distinguished for and universally recognizable by its seven hills. The famous seven hills are the Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline hills.[3]

Suetonius and Plutarch record for us that in the time of Domitian the festival of *Septimontium* ("the feast of the seven hilled city") was held annually in December to celebrate the seven hills enclosing Rome.[4] Archaeologists have discovered the Coin (or Medallion) of Vespasian that exhibits a picture of the goddess Roma as a woman seated on seven hills.[5] The famed seven hills are frequently mentioned among ancient writers; see Ovid, Claudian, Statius, Pliny, Virgil, Horace, Properties, Martial, Cicero, *Sibylline Oracles,* Tertullian, and

3. William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography,* vol. *2* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1870), pp. 719-721.

4. Suetonius, *Domitian 4.*

5. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches,* 3rd cd., trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), p. 173. Fausset, in Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Old and New Testaments, 2* vols. (Hartford: Scranton, n.d.) 2:591 (at Rev. 17:9).

Jerome.[6] This point is well nigh indisputably certain. Indeed, "there is scarce a poet that speaks of Rome but observes it."[7] In light of this fact, Mounce's observation is well-taken: "There is little doubt that a first-century reader would understand this reference in any way other than as a reference to Rome, the city built upon seven hills. Rome began as a network of seven hill settlements on the left bank of the Tiber, and was from the time of Servius Tullius (her sixth king [in the pre-imperial era] an *urbs septicollis*) ."[8]

Adam Clarke, who argues against the reference being to first century imperial Rome, struggles against the stream when he admits: "This verse has been almost universally considered to allude to the seven hills upon which Rome originally stood. "[9] G.R. Beasley-Murray sees this geographical reference as putting the identity of the beast as Rome "beyond doubt."[10] H. B. Swete agrees when he writes: "No reasonable doubt can be entertained as to the meaning of these words." [11] Hendriksen writes: "Most commentators, whether preterists or parallelisms — and even some futurists — grant this point. " [12]

By everyone's dating, the Revelation was written sometime during the Roman Empire, and almost every commentator agrees it was after Christianity had begun to be persecuted by Rome (under Nero in A.D. 64). It is difficult to believe that John would write to the seven historical churches in Asia (Rev. 1:11) whose members lived in such an age of great trouble (Rev. 1:9; 2:10; 3:10), make reference to an evil power noted for its "seven mountains," and expect them to surmise that he spoke of anything other than Rome. Especially since

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6. Ovid, *De Tristia* 1:5:69 and *Elegiae* 4; Claudian, *In Praise of Stilicon*, 3:135; Statius, *Sylvae* 1 and 2:191; Pliny, *Natural History*, 3:5, *9;* Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6:782 and Georgia 2:535; Horace, *Cam Secularae*, 7; Properties 3:10, 57; Martial, 4:64; Cicero, *ad Atticum* 6:5; Sibylline Oracles 2:18; 11:1 14; 13:45; 14:108; Tertullian, *Apology*, 35; and Jerome, *Letter to Marcella.*

7. John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament, vol. 3* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1909] 1976), p. 824.

8. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 313-314.

9. Adam Clarke, Clarke's *Commentary, 6* vols. (Nashville Abingdon, n.d.) 6:1038.

10. G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," in Francis Davidson, ed., New *Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 1189.

11. Swete, *Revelation*, p. *220.*

12. William Hendriksen, More *Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 274 n. 5.

he exhorted them to read, hear, and heed the book (Rev. 1:3; 22:7). As Stuart noted of John: "He wrote, not only in order that he might be read, but also that he might be *understood*. Why then should we suppose, that a mind like his would not accomplish its design?" 13 Everywhere throughout the empire Rome was known as the city on seven hills. When John wrote Revelation (whether in the A.D. 60s or in A.D. 95-96) there was no other city conceivable that was so universally noted for its seven hills. It should be expected that as inspired Scripture, it would be profitable (2 Tim. 3:16) to its historical recipients. Indeed, this would be a major and distinctive difference between Revelation and the representatives of the uninspired apocalyptic genre. All of this is especially compelling in that the expectation of the book (as dealt with in the previous chapter) is of the *soon* eventuation of the prophecies and their contemporary relevance to the original audience. The matter of the relevancy of the referent to the original audience should be a paramount concern for the modern interpreter. Consequently, it should not be considered an insoluble dilemma.

The Line of Kings

Now we come to the specific portion of the Revelation 17 statement that is crucial for determining the date of Revelation. Verse 10 states factually and in a straightforward manner: "They are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while."

Here we learn that five kings have "fallen" (ἔπεσαν) and one "is" (#rev). If there is any chronologically precise statement in the book, Revelation 17:10 should certainly be it. Reuss notes that "the time of composition . . . may be closely fixed by xvii. 10."[14] Torrey is quite certain of this passage's utility: "This certainly seems to provide, as exactly as could be expected of an apocalypse, information as to the time – the precise reign – in which the book was composed."[15] Although demurring from its acceptance as such (due to his liberal

13. Moses Stuart, *Commentary* on *the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 2:319.

14. Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, *History of the Sacred Scriptures of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1884), p. 160.

15. Charles Cutler Torrey, The *Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 60.

fragment hypothesis theory), Moffatt comments that this is "the one passage . . . which appears to be a water-mark of the date." [16]

All that is required for determining the chronology indicated by Revelation 17:10 is that we find a series of seven kings, five of whom "have fallen," the sixth of whom "is" still ruling, and the last of whom was of but a brief reign. The one who "is" will be the king alive and ruling at the time John wrote Revelation. Then, of course, the discovery of the dates of his reign will serve as the *termini* within which Revelation must have been composed.

We provided ample demonstration above to show that the place of the seven kings is the famed city of "seven hills," i.e., Rome. And given the contemporary expectation of the book, the obvious candidates for fulfilling the role of the seven kings would have to be the emperors of Rome, the line of the Caesars. It is an indisputable historical fact that the Caesars were ruling at the time John wrote Revelation, regardless of whether an early (pre-A.D. 70) or late (c. A.D. 95) date be advocated.

Various Approaches

Though it seems certain that the line of the emperors is in view in Revelation 17:10, nevertheless, several difficulties arise as to the proper enumeration of the line of the Caesars. In regard to the chronology, two particularly important questions arise: With whom does the enumeration begin? And, are any of the Caesars to be omitted?

Some scholars (e.g., Dusterdieck, Bleek, Swete, Weigall, Morris, and even Torrey and Robinson) [17] begin the counting of the emperors with Augustus, in that he was the first official "emperor." Some (e.g., Dusterdieck, Gilmour, and Rist) [18] in their overall enumeration ornit

16. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 318.

17. Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John,* 3rd cd., trans. Henry E. Jacobs (New York Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), p. 48. Friedrich Bleek, *An Introduction to the New Testament,* 2nd cd., trans. William Urwick, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), p. 226. Swete, *Revelation,* p. 220. Arthur Weigall, Nero: *Emperor of Rome* (London: Butterworth, 1933), p. 298. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 38. Torrey, *Revelation,* p. 60. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 243.

18. Düsterdieck, *Revelation,* p. 49. S. MacLean Gilmour, "The Revelation to John," in Charles M. Laymen, cd., *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville:

Galba, Otho, and Vitellius on the grounds that they were a mere interregnum between Nero and Vespasian in that Suetonius calls them a "*rebellio trium principum.*"[19]

Other scholars (e.g., Mounce, Beckwith, and Sweet)*" see the "seven kings" reference as primarily symbolic, making no essential historical allusions. Employing this approach it may be said that "John's history, like his geography and arithmetic, is *spiritual* (11:8); his hearers needed to be told not *who* was reigning but his spiritual affiliations. The number seven is symbolic — there were many more *churches* than *seven* – though it can refer to actual entities. John means to represent the Roman power as a historic whole."[21] Some argue that the series was inconsequential because John was not a "statistical historian" but rather an "apocalyptic seer." Hence, the number seven involved appeared merely to conform to the sacred requirement of the task.[22]

Still others, particularly among futurists (e.g., Walvoord, Seiss, Ladd, and Alford)[23] hold that the "heads" represent successive kingdoms. This school generally denies the geographical referent as indicating Rome. In this view the seven heads/mountains are representative either of "seven different manifestations of the world-power in history"[24] or "seven kings who represent seven successive forms of the kingdom," that is, "to successive imperial governments."[25]

Our Approach

Let us consider the most readily apparent and surely the correct

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Abingdon, 1971), p. 964. Martin Rist, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," in *The Interpreter's Bible Commentary,* vol. 12 (New York Abingdon, 1957), p. 495.

19. Suetonius, *Vespasian 1.*

20. Mounce, *Revelation,* pp. 315-316. Isbon T. BeckWith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction* (Grand Rapids Baker, [1917] 1967), p. 257.

21. J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation.* Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia Westminster, 1979), p. 257.

22. Shirley Jackson Case, *The Revelation of John: A Historical Interpretation* (Chicago University of Chicago, 1919), pp. 343-344.

23. Walvoord, *Revelation,* pp. 250ff. Joseph A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), pp. 391ff. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 229ff. Henry Alford, *The Creek New Testament, vol.* 4 (Chicago Moody, rep. 1958), pp. 710ff.

24. Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh! An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing, 1969), pp. 572,573.

25. Walvoord, *Revelation,* p. *252.*

view first. Then we will comment upon both the objections to the above proposed view and the deficiencies of the opposing views.

It is true that the Roman empire was officially established as an empire under Augustus, and that there are some scattered lists of the emperors that seem to begin the enumeration with Augustus. Nevertheless, it seems patent that the enumeration of the "kings" should most logically begin with Julius Caesar. As Stuart observed: "At most, only an occasional beginning of the count with Augustus can be shown, in classic authors. The almost universal usage is against it »26

For instance, as we consider TacitUs's statements in *Annals* 1:127 and *Histories* 1:1,28 we discover that in regard to information relevant to our inquiry he really only states two things of consequence regarding Augustus as emperor. One is that Julius refused to be called "king," while Augustus accepted such a designation. The other is that the empire was established on an *uninterrupted* foundation with Augustus (upon Julius's death the empire was involved in a power struggle for twelve years). Here, then, we do not have a denial of Julius's role as the first "king" of the empire at all. Neither do we have a denial of his role as the first ruler of what shortly would become the Roman Empire.

The same is true of the statement of Aurelius Victor (4th century) in his *Abbreviated History of the Caesars.* He, too, speaks of the *uninterrupted* state of rule in Rome. In his *Epitome (1:1)* is another example of the idea of permanency, along with formal usage of the titles *Imperator* and *Augustus.* Nothing he writes precludes the understanding that Julius was the first of the Roman Emperors. Other such references are much later than even Victor, and are thus too far beyond the era in which John wrote to be of much value. The determination should be based upon relatively contemporaneous authorities current in his day.

As a matter of historical fact, we must note that Julius did claim

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26. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:276.

27. *Annals* 1:1 states: "Neither Cinna nor Sulla created a lasting despotism: Pompey and Crassus quickly forfeited their power to Caesar, and Lepidus and An tony their swords to Augustus, who, under the style of 'Prince,' gathered beneath his empire a world outworn by civil broils."

28. *Histories 1:1* notes: "After the battle of Actium, when the intereats of peace required that all power should be concentrated in the hands of *one* man. . . ."

the title *Imperator*. Suetonius clearly records his claim to the "*praenomen Imperatoris*. "*2*[9] This puts him in line with Augustus[30] and the following emperors who naturally claimed the same. Indeed, the following emperors even called themselves by his name, "Caesar."

But more compelling than this are the several contemporary and nearly contemporary lists that include Julius in the line of the Caesars, and as the first of the line. In his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, Roman historian Suetonius (c. A.D. 70-160) begins his numbering of the Caesars with Julius. His first book. in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* is entitled *The Divine Julius*. Likewise another Roman Historian, Dio Cassius (c. A.D. 150-235), numbers Julius as the first of the emperors.3[1]

For our purposes perhaps the most decisive representative of those who reckon the emperors from Julius is the Jewish writer Flavius Josephus. Not only do his dates (A.D. 37-101) overlap the very period ofJohn and the New Testament, but he is also a Jew from Palestine, and his works were written for both the Remans and the Jews. Surely his reckoning would reflect contemporary opinion among the Jews and the Remans. In his *Antiquities* he calls Augustus the "second" and Tiberius the "third" emperor.[32] Later Gaius is called the "fourth."3[3] In a later chapter he calls Julius the "first who transferred the power of the people to himself."[34] In addition, we should understand that the Jewish people were particularly fond of Julius. He granted them a legal status and many special privileges. Suetonius records the great lamentation of the Jews for Julius when he died.[35] A Jew, such as Josephus and John, would naturally have conceived of Julius as the first of the Caesars.

Further evidence for a common Jewish reckoning of Julius as the first emperor appears in 4 Ezra (a composite work with Christian additions,[36] sometimes called 2 Esdras). This work was written and

29. Suetonius, *Julius 76*.
30. See for example, Aurelius Victor, *Epitome* 1:1.
31. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 5.
32. *Antiquities* 18:2:2.
33. Antiquities 18:6:10.
34. *Antiquities 19:1:11.*
35. Julius 84
36. Bruce M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in James H. Charlesworth, cd., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2* vols (Garden City, NY Doubleday, 1983) 1:517.

edited between A.D. 100 and 120, with four chapters being added in the third century.37 The crucial statement reads: "Behold, the days are coming when a kingdom shall arise on earth, and it shall be more terrifying than all the kingdoms that have been before it. And twelve kings shall reign in it, one after another. But the second that is to reign shall hold sway for a longer time than any other of the twelve."38 Here Julius is included in the line of the twelve Caesars, for the reference to the "second" king is obviously to Augustus Caesar, whose 44 year reign was one-third of the combined reigns of the first twelve emperors.

The same is true in chapter 11: "And I looked, and behold, on the right side one wing arose, and it reigned over all the earth. And while it was reigning it came to its end and disappeared, so that its place was not seen. Then the next wing arose and reigned, and it continued to reign a long time. And while it was reigning its end came also, so that it disappeared like the first. And behold, a voice sounded, saying to it, 'Hear me, you who have ruled the earth all this time; I announce this to you before you disappear. After you no one shall rule as long as you, or even half as long.' The third wing raised itself up, and held the rule like the former ones, and it also disappeared."39 Coggins notes that "the first wing can be identified as Julius Caesar because the next wing is clearly Augustus."40 According to Box "one of the surest results of the critical discussion is that in the original vision the greater wings must represent the six Julian Emperors, beginning with Julius Caesar. The identification of the second ruler with Augustus (cf. 11:15- 17) is unmistakable, and makes the reckoning from Julius Caesar certain."41 Again the clear reference is to Julius as the "first" and Augustus (the longest reigning emperor) as the one who followed him, who in turn, is followed by the "third." And this "prophecy" was given in the general era of John's time.

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37. Metzger, "Fourth Ezra," *OTP* 1:517, 520, 522. See also R. J. Coggins and M. A. Knibb, *The First and Second Books of Esdras*. Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (London: Cambridge, 1979), p. 115; J. M. Myers, I and 2 *Esdras: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 129K.; and Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 247, 315. Howard Clark Kee, *The Origins of Christianity:* Sources *and Documents* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 191.

38. 4 Ezra 12:13ff.; *OTP* 1:550.

39. 4 Ezra 11:13ff.; *OTP 1:548.*

40. Coggins and Knibb, *Esdras*, p. 240.

41. G. H. Box, *The Ezra-Apocalypse* (London: Pitman, 1912), p. 261.

The Epistle of Barnabas 4:4 speaks of ten kings upon the earth: "Ten kings shall reign upon the earth, and a little king shall rise up after them, who shall subdue under one three of the kings." The three subdued kings represent Galba, Otho, and Vitellius.[42] The tenth must be Vespasian, which indicates a start from Julius.[43] According to many scholars, this work was written around the year A.D. 100.[44] Thus, it too is in the era of John's Revelation, and it necessarily implies that the emperor count in that era began with Julius.

The earlier Sibylline Oracles, as well, follow the pattern of beginning with Julius. Book 5 of the Sibylline Oracles speaks cryptically of Julius:

> There will be the first prince who will sum up twice ten with his initial letter. He will conquer long in wars. He will have his first letter of ten, so that after him will reign whoever obtained as initial the first of the alphabet.[45]

Collins's note on this reference specifies that it is to Julius Caesar.[46] Book 8 of the Sibylline Oracles is dated at A.D. 180.[47] The reference at 8:135-138 to there being "fifteen kings" requires a counting of Julius. Collins notes of this section that it speaks of "Roman kings, beginning with Julius Caesar and counting Galba, Otho, and Vitellius."[48] Sibylline Oracles 11:26 lff. mention Julius as the first of the Roman emperors.

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42. Bell notes that "no ancient writer of whom I have knowledge omits these three men from his account of Roman history. . . . [A]n ancient writer could no more have omitted them from his list of emperors than a modern American historian could omit William Henry Harrison, the ninth president, who caught pneumonia at his inauguration in 1841 and died a month later. His influence on the course of American history was absolutely nil, but he was duly elected, inaugurated, and therefore must be reckoned in any accurate listing of men who have held that office. The same principle applies to Galba, Otho and Vitellius" (Albert A. Bell, Jr., "The Date of John's Apocalypse. The Evidence of Some Roman Historians Reeonsidered," New *Testament Studies* 10 [1977-78] :99)

43. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 243.

44. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF],* 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [late 19th c.] 1975) 1:133-135. In their introductory remarks, Roberts and Donaldson mention Hilgenfeld (1866) as one "who has devoted much attention to this Epistle" and who "holds that 'it was written at the close of the first century by a Gentile Christian of the school of Alexandria. . . .'"

45. *Sibylline Oracles* 5: 12-15; *OTP* 1:393.

46. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP 1:393.*

47. Ibid., p. 416.

48. *Ibid.,* p. 421, note q.

Theophilus of Antioch lived c. A.D. 115 to 181.[49] He wrote: "Afterwards those who are called emperors began in this order: first, Caius Julius . . . , then Augustus."[50]

Other later sources (and thus less significant) also concur in beginning with Julius Caesar. Moses Stuart lists the following witnesses: The *Chronicon Paschale* (dated about 400), Georgius Syncellus in his *Chronography* (about 800), and Nicephorus Patriarch (about 824) in his *Compend of Chronography*.[51]

From the above considerations we are justified in viewing the kings list of Revelation 17 as indicating the line of Roman emperors as beginning with Julius Caesar. Consequently, the count of the emperors into the first century is as follows:

1. Julius Caesar (49-44 B. C.)
2. Augustus (31 B. C.-A.D. 14)
3. Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)
4. Gaius, also known as Caligula (A.D. 37-41)
5. Claudius (A.D. 41-54)
6. Nero *(A.D. 54-68)*
7. Galba (A.D. 68-69)
8. Otho (A.D. 69)
9. Vitellius (A.D. 69)
10. Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)

Revelation 17:10 says: "They are seven kings; five have fallen, [i.e., Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius], one is [i.e., Nero], the other has *not yet* come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while [i.e., Galba reigned from June, 68 to January, 69] ." It seems indisputably clear that the book of Revelation must be dated in the reign of Nero Caesar, and consequently *before* his death in June, A.D. 68. He is the sixth king; the short-lived rule of the seventh king (Galba) "has not yet come."

In addition to all the foregoing, it would seem unreasonable to exclude Julius from the list in light of the circumstances and subject matter of the book. As will be shown in a later chapter – and as held

49. *ANF* 2:87.
50. *Ibid.*, p.120. *Theophilus to Antolycus* 2:28.
51. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 24-48.

by virtually all commentators – emperor worship does at the very least make an appearance in Revelation. As a matter of historical record, emperor worship began with Julius Caesar. To exclude him from the enumeration of a list of pagan emperors in a work such as Revelation would be highly questionable – especially when his name was given to the line of the emperors: the Caesars.

Objections Considered

Let us at this point briefly consider some of the more significant objections to the above construction of the evidence and the interpretation of the passage presented.

The Designation of Emperors as "Kings"

Some might object to the approach outlined above in that the emperors were not properly called "kings." Despite the formal validity of such an objection, it is not a weighty argument. As a matter of fact, it was not uncommon for the emperors to be referred to as "kings." This is even done in Scripture itself. In 1 Peter 2:13, 17 and 1 Timothy 2:2 we must understand the references to kings as signifying even the Roman emperors. To overlook the emperors in these commands would be a serious interpretive error. Surely the call to obedience to and prayer for "kings" includes the ultimate source of political rule in the first century, i.e., the emperor. In John 19:15 the chief priests claimed before Pilate: "We have no king but Caesar." In Acts 17:7 Jason is accused of rebellion for receiving Christians into his home, when it is said: "Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus." Thus, the Bible itself clearly calls the emperors kings elsewhere. This should control the matter.

Such a practice of calling emperors "kings" was not uncommon in the first centuries.[52] Julius Caesar tried to rid himself of the odium that he aspired to be king by telling those who hailed him as king: "I am Caesar and no king."[53] The very fact, however, that commoners did hail him as king is indicative of the popular perception. In

52. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:325. Frederick W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, 1884), p. 413n, cites H. A. Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel bis Christus*, 3rd ed., 7 vols. (Göttingen: 1864-1868), 6:604ff. [English translation by Russell Martineau and J. E. Carpenter, 5 vols. (London: 1871 -1876).]

53. Suetonius, *Julius* 79.

Seneca's *On Clemency*, which was addressed to Nero, Nero is called "*rex*:" "The Princeps should not only heal but leave no shameful scar; no glory comes to a king from cruel punishment," and "You think it hard that complete freedom of speech should be taken from kings." Martial speaks of Nero as "the cruel king."[54]

The Roman emperors are called "kings" in the Sibylline Oracles. In Sibylline Oracles Book 12 Augustus (12:25, 35), Gaius (12:57), Domitian (12:137), Nerva (12:145), Trajan (12:147), Marcus Aurelius (12: 188), Commodus (12:208), and Pertinax (12:236) are called "kings."[55] The pre-Eusebian work entitled *The Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John t/z Theologian* calls Domitian "king" a number of times. In one alleged meeting of the Jews with him in this work, their entreaty begins: "O Domitian, Caesar and king of all the world. . . ." The work says of Trajan: "And when he was king over the Romans. . . ."[56] Sulpicius Severus speaks of *Nero* thus: "As to Nero, I shall not say that he was the worst of kings, but that he was worthily held the basest of all men, and even of wild beasts."[57] *The History of John the Son of Zebedee* speaks of Nero as a "wicked king."[58] In *The Giving Up of Pontius Pilate,* "Pilate" calls Tiberius Caesar "almighty king."[59]

The evidence in this direction could be multiplied. This argument against Revelation 17:10 applying to the line of the emperors is wholly without merit.

The Emperors of the Roman Civil War

Some scholars object to the inclusion of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius on the grounds that: (1) Suetonius calls them a "*rebellio trium principum*," and (2) their short claims to power (none over seven months) would have been inconsequential to the far-flung provinces, such as the Asian province to which John addressed Revelation. Moffatt dismissed this trio as a "brief nightmare" in imperial his-

54. Martial, *Book of Spectacles* 2.

55. See also the following Sibylline Oracles: 4:119; 5:138, 221, 224, 233; &131-138; 11:286; 13:15.

56. See *ANF* 8:560, *562.*

57. Sacred History 2:28.

58. William Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Philo, [1871] 1968), p. 55.

59. See *ANF* 8:464.

tory.[60] If these three are removed, then it is difficult to account for the seventh emperor being one who rules only a "short while." For if we begin with Julius and exclude Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, we arrive at Vespasian as the seventh. Yet Vespasian ruled for 10 years (A.D. 69-79), hardly a "short time."

To find the objectors citing Suetonius as evidence that the three emperors of Rome's Civil War were not really considered emperors is somewhat surprising. After all, Suetonius does include them in his book *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*! Furthermore, these three are considered emperors by Tacitus, Josephus, Sibylline Oracles, and 4 Ezra, as well.[61]

As to their being inconsequential to far-flung provinces such as Asia Minor, such is simply not the case. Certainly their policy changes (such as there were) would have had little time to make even a negligible impact on provincial affairs. But the fact of their warring for the purple would most definitely be taken note of by the provinces. And this is as true for the eastern provinces, as for other provinces. Jerusalem and Judea certainly breathed a sigh of relief at these rapid accessions. Josephus tells us that Vespasian halted his devastating military operations against Israel while awaiting the outcome of the Roman Civil War.[62] And as noted in an earlier portion of the present study, Revelation has as a major focus God's judgment on the Jews.

We should not consider it "doubtful whether a writer living under the Flavian Emperors would reckon Galba, Otho, or Vitellius among the Augusti."[63] Indeed, the contortions through which H. B. Swete (and others of like position on the line of the kings in Revelation 17) must pass to arrive at a Domitianic date are almost evidence enough to discredit his entire enterprise. Swete laboriously confronts the problem in a way damaging to the unity of the book and antithetical to its revelatory character: "How can the date which appears to be assigned to this vision by the writer himself be reconciled with the traditional date [i.e., 95] of the Apocalypse? It may of course be that the Apocalyptist incorporates at this point an older Christian prophecy, or reedits his own earlier work. But it is equally possible that in

60. Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 318.

61. Tacitus, *Histories* 1: 1ff.; 2: 10; Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 4:9:2; Sibylline Oracles 5:35; and 4 Ezra 12:20ff.

62. *Wars* 49 and 411.

63. Swete, *Revelation*, p. 220.

the vision of the Woman and the Beast he purposely transfers himself in thought to the time of Vespasian (*ὁ εἷς ἔστιν*), interpreting past events under the form of prophecy after the manner of apocalyptic writers."[64]

The Symbolic Nature of Revelation

Some scholars doubt the utility of the Revelation 17 kings list in dating the book in that Revelation is preeminently a symbolic book. For instance, J. P. M. Sweet argues that "John's history, like his geography and arithmetic, is spiritual (11:8); his hearers needed to be told not *who* was reigning but his spiritual affiliations. The number seven is symbolic – there were many more *churches* than *seven* – though it can refer to actual entities. John 'means to represent the Roman power as a historic whole.'"[65]

The first and most obvious problem with such a statement is the fatal admission he makes: "though it can refer to actual entities." That being the case, the question arises: why not here? Beyond that we should consider that the Christians of the era *would* think it important to know not only the "spiritual affiliations" of the reigning king, but also his identity – not the connotation only of the "king," but also his denotation. *Their lives were literally on the line.* Why would they not need to know? What is so incredible with knowing the identity of one's enemies when promised the information? Besides, the very passage in question is, as we have stated above, an explication of the symbolism that purports to *elucidate* the matter (Rev. 17:7). Whereas in the illustrative verse alluded to by Sweet (i.e., Rev. 11:8), John clearly says the designation is "spiritual." After John gives the spiritual reference, even there he provides a clear, indisputable historical geographic reference: The city that is spiritually called "Sodom and Egypt" is "where also their Lord was crucified."

All agree that the book makes a symbolic use of numbers. But we must understand that it is the sovereign God of heaven and earth who makes that usage. Is it necessarily impossible to find a direct correspondence between the symbolic numbers and historic reality? After all, both spiritual symbolism and historical-geographical reality proceed forth from the same source: the One seated above the chaos

64. *Ibid.*, p. 221.
65. Sweet, *Revelation*, p. 257. Cp. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 704-708.

in sublime control, Almighty God (Rev. 4). As a matter of fact, the seven churches in Revelation were historical churches in historical Asia. As a matter of historical fact, Rome was the persecutor of the Church, and it was located on sewn hills. Is it not quite remarkable that Nero was, in reality, the sixth emperor and he was, in reality, followed by a seventh who reigned only a "short time"? If the Neronic date be accepted, the enumeration of the "kings" covers all of imperial history *up until John's time* and the events "shortly" to follow. Surely the large, rounded numbers of Revelation – e.g., 1000, 144,000, and 200,000,000 – should be understood as symbols, but it is not at all clear that the smaller numbers or shorter time-frames must be so understood (especially in light of the previous considerations).

Furthermore, it could well be that John did mean "to represent the Roman power as a historic whole." But this is the very point: if John wrote before A.D. 68 he was writing about the whole of the Roman power! For then it would be the case that in John's day only six emperors had ascended the imperial throne.

> But why only seven kings? First because the number seven is the reigning symbolic number of the book; then, secondly, because this covers the ground which the writer means specially to occupy, viz., it goes down to the period when the persecution then raging would cease.[66]

Finally, despite the symbolic nature of apocalyptic non-biblical literature in general – often an extravagant and excessive symbolism — apocalyptic political referents were almost invariably of a chronological-historical nature. In the Sibylline Oracles and 2 Esdras this is undeniably the case. Why should it not be so here?

The "Kings" as Kingdoms

Other commentators object that the proper interpretation of the matter would involve not a series of seven *kings,* but of seven *kingdoms.* One commentator interprets the symbol as indicating: "seven different manifestations of the world-power in history. As we have remarked, the picture of the beast in our text places before us the historic development of the world-power, as well as its final formation. And the former is symbolized in the heads. That this is the case

66. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:325, 326.

is plain from the language of the angels. He tells us about these heads that one is, that five have fallen, and that one is not yet, evidently pointing to succession."[67] Another argues similarly: "The seven heads are best explained as referring to seven kings who represent seven successive forms of the kingdom. "[68]

Various problems beset the view that the "kings" represent "kingdoms," rendering it unfit as an adequate interpretive option. First, the word given to help John understand the vision is "kings" (βασιλεῖς). This word never means "kingdom." Second, as noted above, the obvious allusion to Rome via the "seven hills" cannot be mistaken. To allow it to refer to something other than Rome would be a cruel taunting of the original audience. Especially would this be so since the angel declared that he was assisting in the interpretation! Third, as noted in a earlier section of the present study, the expectation of the book is that of the events being "at hand" and "near" (Rev. 1:1,3, 19; 3:10; 6:10; 22:6, 10,12, 20).

Conclusion

Revelation 17 points specifically to the present rule of a sixth "king" in a succession of seven that rule from seven hills. In light of the various considerations outlined above, it is obvious that a convincing case can be made for a date sometime during the reign of Nero, particularly in the latter years of his reign. Although this does not specify the exact year of dating, it does clearly obviate a late date for Revelation. And when this extremely strong piece of evidence is combined with all that given heretofore and with the yet-to-come internal evidence, the early date position approaches certainty.

67. Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh*, pp. .572, 573.

68. Walvoord, *Revelation*, p. 250. See also Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 229. It is a frequent source of frustration that despite loud calls for a hermeneutic of "consistent liberalism" by dispensational premillennialist, such a denial of this historically verifiable referent is urged by them. For calls to liberalism in Revelation, see Walvoord, Revelation, p. 21; and Charles C. Ryrie, *The Living End* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976), p. 37.

11

THE CONTEMPORARY INTEGRITY OF THE TEMPLE

Another noteworthy historical datum in Revelation is found in Revelation 11 where we discover a reference to the Temple. Verses 1 and 2 of Revelation 11 contain the relevant temporal indicators:

> And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, "Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it. And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months."

The Significance of Revelation 11

A good number of competent scholars have long recognized the significance of this passage for the interpretation and the dating of the book. Bleek notes the existence of the Temple as a significant indicator "with tolerable clearness" of Revelation's historical era: "As to the *time of writing*, there are several statements which indicate this with tolerable clearness, and to which we have already referred. In the first division (ch. xi. 1-14) . . . Jerusalem and the temple are spoken of as still standing." [1] Düsterdieck writes with deep conviction regarding Revelation 11:1 ff.: "It is sufficient for chronological interest, that prophecy depends upon the *presupposition that the destruction of the Holy City had not yet occurred.* This is derived with the greatest evidence from the text, since it is said, ver. 2, that the Holy City, i.e., Jerusalem, is to be trodden down by the Gentiles. . . . This testimony of the Apoc., which is completely indisputable to an unpreju-

1. Johannes Friedrich Bleek, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2 vols., 2nd cd., trans. William Urwick (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870) 2:226.

diced mind, can still be misunderstood only with great difficulty."2 Weiss concurs: "The time of the Apocalypse is also definitely fixed by the fact that according to the prophecy in chap. xi. it was manifestly written before the destruction of Jerusalem, which in xi. 1 is only anticipated."3 Writing at about the same time, Macdonald expresses a similarly strong conviction: "It is difficult to see how language could more clearly point to Jerusalem, and to Jerusalem as it was before its overthrow."4

More recently we can note that Torrey depends upon the usefulness of this passage for the dating of the book: "A most important passage, truly decisive in view of all the other evidence, is the beginning (the first two verses) of chapter 11. . . . This was written before the year 70, as all students of the book agree."5 Even more recently still, Robinson has written of this critical passage: "It is indeed generally agreed that this passage must bespeak a pre-70 situation. . . . There seems therefore no reason why the oracle should not have been uttered by a Christian prophet as the doom of the city drew nigh."[6] Robinson, indeed, regards the whole matter of the destruction of the Temple as a critical issue for the dating of the entire New Testament. Two excerpts from his important work will illustrate his (correct, we believe) view regarding the significance of the destruction of the Temple for New Testament studies:

> It was at this point that I began to ask myself just why *any* of the books of the New Testament needed to be put after the fall of Jerusalem in 70. As one began to look at them, and in particular the epistle to the Hebrews, Acts and the Apocalypse, was it not strange that this cataclysmic event was never once mentioned or apparently hinted at [i.e., as a past fact – KLG]?[7]

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2. Friedrich Düsterdieck, Critical and *Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John, 3rd* cd., trans. Henry E. Jacobs (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), pp. 46-47.

3. Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. A. J. K. Davidson, 2 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889) 2:82.

4. James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), p. 159.

5. Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John (New* Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 87. It is lamentable that Torrey, speaking as *a* liberal, overstates his case when he avers that "all students of the book agree" that this passage "was written before the year 70. "

6. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia Westminster, 1976), pp. 240-242.

7. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 10.

> One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period — the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 — is never once mentioned as a past fact. . . . [T]he silence is nevertheless as significant as the silence for Sherlock Holmes of the dog that did not bark.[8]

The clarity of the historical inference from Revelation 11:1, 2 is so strong that this passage has played prominently – even if wrongly – in the various higher critical fragment hypotheses. Moffatt, for instance, views this section as a pre-A.D. 70 Jewish fragment, and claims that this is "widely recognised by critics and editors. "g Apparently Wellhausen was the first to propose this view.[10] Charles writes in this regard: "Our author has used sources, and several of these were written under Nero, or at all events before the fall of Jerusalem. . . . Hence such statements as clearly suppose a Neronic date (i.e., in 11:1-13; 12 (?); 13:1-7, 10) are simply survivals in the sources used by our author. "[11] Later, in his actual commentary on the passage, he notes in true higher critical form: "xi. 1-13 consists of two independent fragments, both written before 70 A.D. . . . [It is] a *fragment that bore definitely on its face the date of 70 A.D.* when Jerusalem still stood."[12]

The composite theory will not work, however. The book of Revelation is no conflation of sources. Yale's C. C. Torrey (no conservative theologian by any stretch of the imagination) puts it well when he writes:

> There are indeed very obvious reasons why the Apocalypse should now seem to call for drastic alteration, for it cannot be made to fit the present scheme of New Testament dogma. If the Church in its beginnings was mainly Gentile and opposed to Judaism, this Book of Revelation can hardly be understood. It is very plainly a mixture of Jewish and Christian elements, and the hope of effecting a separation of the two naturally suggests itself It is, however, a perfectly futile dream, as the many attempts have abundantly shown. Every chapter in the book is both Jewish and Christian, and only by very arbitrary

8. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

9. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), pp. 287ff., 414, cp. 281-295.

10. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1920) 1:274.

11. *Ibid.*, 1:xciii-xcix.

12. *Ibid.* 1:270, 271.

> proceedings can signs of literary composition be formed. The trouble is not with the book, but with the prevailing theory of Christian origins.'3

In another place he comments that "the book is a unity, in no sense composite. Detailed proof, quite unanswerable, will be found in H. B. Swete's *Apocalypse of St. John (1906)."*[14]

Moffatt surveys a number of the leading exponents of the fragment hypothesis who use these two verses (among others) as evidence for their theories. These scholars argue that Revelation 11:1, 2 was written prior to the Temple's destruction and were later incorporated editorially by a Christian editor into Revelation. Besides himself, he lists the following names: Weyland, F. Spitta, Pfleiderer, J. Weiss, C. von Weizsacker, Schon, W. Bousset, A. C. M'Giffert, A. Meyer, Abbott, Baljon, Wiede, P. W. Schmiedel, Calmes, C. A. Briggs, Erbes, F. Barth, Bruston, K. L. Schmidt, Eugene de Faye, Volter, O. Holtzmann, Vischer, A. von Harnack, Martineau, Von Soden, and C. Rausch.[15] More recently Kümmel cites such names as I. T. Beckwith, A. H. McNeile, C. S. William, H. Windisch, S. Giet, M. Rissi, de Zwaan, and M. Goguel.[16] From a conservative perspective, which is committed to the inspirational and revelatory character of Scripture, the higher critical theories created by these men are deemed woefully ill-conceived in that they operate on anti-supernaturalistic principles. Nevertheless, the scholars who create them are working upon real and valid evidence, even though they misconstrue the nature and function of that historical evidence. We wholeheartedly concur with Adams's assessment that the fact that the Temple was standing when Revelation was written is "unmistakable proof that Revelation was written before 70 A.D."[17]

Let us then turn to a careful consideration of the passage before us in order to determine its significance for a pre-A.D. 70 dating for Revelation. It should be remembered from the introductory state-

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13. Charles C. Torrey, *Documents oft/u Primitive Church (New* York Harper, 1941), p. 77.

14. *Ibid.,* p. 149.

15. Moffatt, *Revelation,* pp. 287, 292-293.

16. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament,* 17th cd., trans. Howard C. Kee, (Nashville Abingdon, 1973), pp. 463-464.

17. Jay E. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966), p. 68.

ments at the outset of this study that the present writer regards the Revelation as unified, inspired, canonical Scripture. Thus, the patchwork approach of the multitudinous higher critical theories — i.e. theories of compilation, revision, and incorporation – will not be considered, in that such imply the non-inspirational quality of Revelation as we now possess it. Other works can be consulted to deal with this important question of critical introduction. [18]

The Identity of the Temple

The first and most important question to consider for the present purpose is that of the identity of this Temple with its outer courts. Do these stand as purely symbolic representations of the Church (as per Milligan, Caird, Mounce,[19] and many others) ? Or is there embodied here a reference to the earthly Temple of Herod that existed during Jesus' day (as per Stuart, Terry, Charles, Robinson,*" and others) ? Let us consider the evidences for its referent specifying the literal Herodian Temple of Jesus' day. After this we will survey the contrary arguments that are deemed supportive of a symbolic representation.

The Location of the Temple

In the first place, the Temple, altar, and court are said to be located in "the holy city" that is to be trodden under foot. This "holy city" reference seems a clear enough allusion to Jerusalem that was

18. See especially Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), pp. xlvi f.; and Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 964-969. The vast and conflicting mass of fragmentary hypotheses renders the whole enterprise suspect to the candid mind. Furthermore, that John (or the alleged final Christian editor) would incorporate an oracle of a Jewish zealot spoken during Titus's siege of A.D. 70 (as per Wellhausen, Charles, et. al.) in a work finally edited in the A.D. 90s is, as Caird has said, "improbable, useless, and absurd." Why would John the Editor employ such a prediction 25 or more years after the falsifying of the prophecy? G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New* York Harper& Row, 1966), p. 131.

19. William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London Macmillan, 1893), pp. 95ff: "The whole description is clearly figurative." Caird, *Revelation,* p. 132. Robert H. Mounce, The *Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 35.

20. Moses Stuart, *Commentary* on *the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1:213fE; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), pp.473ff.; Charles, *Revelation* 1:269ff.; Robinson, *Redating,* pp. 238ff.

often called the "holy city" in both the Old Testament (e.g., Isa. 48:2; 52:1; Neh. 11: 1-18)[21] and the New Testament (Matt. 4:5; 27:53), as well as in non-canonical, Jewish literature (1 Mace. 2:7; 2 Mace. 1:12; 3:1; 9:14; 15:14; Tob. 13:10; Sir. 36:12; 49:6; Psa. Sol. 8:4). What other city besides Jerusalem ever had a just claim to such a designation in Scripture? It was historically known as the "city of God" (Psa. 46:4; 48:1, 8; 87:3), "my holy mountain" (Isa. 11:9; 56:7; 57:13:65:11, 25), the "city of the Great King" (Psa. 48:2; Matt. 5:35), and other such sacred and intimate designations by God in Scripture. Coins minted during the Jewish War of A.D. 67-70 bore the legend ירושלם קודשה, or הקדשה, Jerusalem the Holy.** Furthermore, what should be a blatantly obvious contextual clue specifically designates the city as the place "where also their Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8): "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." This modifying clause ("where also their Lord was crucified") seems to be given to insure the proper identifying of the city that is referred to mystically as "Sodom and Egypt" (v. 8).23 The greatest crime of all history was perpetrated at Jerusalem, for "the Lord of glory" who "came unto His own" was crucified there (Matt. 16:21; Mark 8:31; 10:32-34; Luke 9:22; 13:32; 17: 11; 19:28). Through spiritual metamorphosis the once "holy city" has been transformed into an unholy "Egypt" and "Sodom." The *symbolic* references are: "Egypt" and "Sodom." The *literal,* geographical referent here is not another symbol, but the historical city Jerusalem.[24]

Again, the theme of the book should be recalled at this juncture. Revelation was written to warn that "those who pierced Him" (the Jews of the first century) would see His cloud-judgment coming upon them. Hence, the significance of Jerusalem in this passage as the place where the Lord was crucified.

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21. See also the pseudepigraphical *Psalms of Solomon* 8:4.

22. George Adam Smith, Jerusalem: *The Topography, Economics and History from the Earliest Times to A.D. 70, vol. 1* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1907), p. 270.

23. Cp. Is. 1:9-10 and Eze. 16:46-49 for Old Testament denunciations of Jerusalem as "Sodom. "

24. In addition, the mention of the streets in Rev. 11:8 and the deaths of 7000 people by earthquake further preclude the designation from being applied to a "secularized church." See Hermann Gebhardt, *The Doctrine of the Apocalypse,* trans. John Jefferson (Edinburgh: T.& T. Clark, 1878), pp. 11ff.

Some maintain that the phrase "the great city" (Rev. 11 :8) indicates Rome. That the city is thus designated, however, should pose no hindrance to accepting the referent as indicating historic Jerusalem. Such an appellation should not excite wonder among those who are aware of either the covenantal-redemptive significance of Jerusalem, or its historical fame.

Historically even pagan historians and writers speak of its magnificence. The Roman historian Tacitus prefaces his history of its destruction by Vespasian and Titus with words quite compatible with such a designation as in Revelation 11:8: "However, as I am about to describe the last days of a famous city, it seems proper for me to give some account of its origin. "25 Jerusalem housed a Temple that, according to Tacitus "was famous beyond all other works of men."[26] Another Roman historian, Pliny, said of Jerusalem that it was "by far the most famous city of the ancient Orient. "27 According to Josephus a certain Agatharchides spoke of Jerusalem thus: "There are a people called Jews, who dwell in a city the strongest of all other cities, which the inhabitants call Jerusalem. "28 Appian called it "the great city Jerusalem."[29] Truly, then, Jerusalem was "one of the most famous cities of the civilized world" at that time.[30]

More important, however, is the covenantal significance of Jerusalem. The obvious role of Jerusalem in the history of the covenant should merit it such greatness.[31] The intense Jewish love of Jerusalem pictured it as of great stature among the famous cities of the nations. In the Fifth Book of the Sibylline Oracles, we have a Jewish oracle

25. *Histories* 5:2.

26. *Fragments of the Histories* 2.

27. Natural *History* .5:1470.

28. *Against Apion* 1:197.

29. *The Syrian Wars* 50.

30. David Ben-Gurion, *The Jews in Their Land,* trans. Mordechai Nurock and Misha Louvish (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 152.

31. Smith writes of the well-known tendency to call Jerusalem "Sion": "*Sion is* become the full equivalent of Jerusalem [Zech. 1:114, 17; 8:3; Zeph. 3:16]. . ." He then notes that "the name is as closely attached to the Lord as to His people. Sion is Sion of the Holy One of Israel [Isa. 50:14], His Holy Mount [Joel 2:1, 15], and dwelling place [Joel 3:17], the nation herself [Zeph. 3:14]; the pure and holy nucleus of the nation [Isa. 59:20]" (Smith, Jerusalem 1:149- 150). Clearly then, Jerusalem/Sion was of covenantal greatness to the Jew and to those who entered her covenantal stream of history.

written (apparently) from Egypt in the 90s.[32] In this oracle Jerusalem is spoken of thus:

> He seized the divinely built Temple and burned the citizens and peoples who went into it, men whom I rightly praised.
>
> For on his appearance the whole creation was shaken and kings perished, and those in whom sovereignty remained destroyed a *great city* and righteous people. . . .[33]
>
> For murder and terrors are in store for all men because of *the great city* and righteous people which is preserved throughout everything which Providence held in special place. . . .[34]
>
> But now a certain insignificant and impious king has gone up, cast it down, and left it in ruins with a great horde and illustrious men. He himself perished at immortal hands when he left the land, and no such sign has yet been performed among men that others should think to sack a *great city*.[35]

Josephus sadly extols Jerusalem's lost glory after its destruction:

> This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.[36]
>
> And where is not that *great city, the* metropolis of the Jewish nation, which was fortified by so many walls round about, which had so many fortresses and large towers to defend it, which could hardly contain the instruments prepared for the war, and which had so many ten thousands of men to fight for it? Where is this city that was believed to have God himself inhabiting therein? It is now demolished to the very foundations.[37]

He also records John of Gischala's retort to Titus's call (through the captured Josephus) for the surrender of the city; John refused to surrender Jerusalem because "it was God's own city."[38]

Edersheim reminds us that "'Ten measures of beauty,' say the

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32. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP 1:390.*
33. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:150-154; *OTP* 1:396. Emphasis mine.
34. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:225-227; *OTP* 1:398. Emphasis mine.
35. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:408-413; *OTP 1:403.* Emphasis mine.
36. *The Wars of the Jews 7:1:1.*
37. *Wars* 7:8:7. Emphasis mine.
38. *Wars 6:2:1.*

Rabbis, 'bath God bestowed upon the world, and nine of these fall to the lot of Jerusalem' – and again, 'A city, the fame of which has gone out from one end of the world to the other.' 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, and eternity.' This – explains the Talmud – 'Is Jerusalem.' In opposition to her rival Alexandria, which was designated 'the little,' Jerusalem was called '*the great.*' "[39]

> By the time of the Exile Jerusalem had come to be known among her people as *The City* in distinction from *The Land;*[40] and this is usual also in the Mishna. It is significant of the growth of her importance both material and spiritual, and of the absence of other cities in the rest of the now much diminished territory. Townships there were, and not a few fenced ones; but Jerusalem stood supreme and alone as The City.[41]

The most natural interpretation of Revelation 11, then, would suggest that the references to the cultic structures have behind them the literal Temple complex, for only Revelation clearly refers to Jerusalem. Even recognizing that the part of the Temple complex to be preserved has a spiritual referent,[42] how could John be commanded to symbolically measure what did not exist with the idea of preserving (in some sense) a part and destroying the rest? Why would there be no reference to its being already destroyed in such a work as this, a work that treats of judgment upon Judaism? When he originally held to a late date for Revelation, Robinson asked himself "Was it not strange that this cataclysmic event was never once mentioned or apparently hinted at"[43] in the books of the New Testament, particularly in Revelation and Hebrews? Moule came to have the same concern.[44] Where is there any reference to the rebuilding of the Temple in Revelation so that it could be again destroyed (as per the dispensationalist argument) ? Such a suppressed premise is essential to the futurist argument. If there is no reference to a rebuilding of the Temple and the book was written about A.D. 95,

39. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1975), p. 82.

40. Eze. 7:23; Jer. 32:24ff; Psa. 72:16; Isa. 46:6.

41. Smith, *Jerusalem,* 1:269.

42. See below.

43. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 10.

44. C. D. F. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament* (3rd cd.: New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 175.

how could the readers make sense of its prophecies?

The Measuring of the Temple

In the second place, the measuring of the Temple is for the preservation of its innermost aspects, i.e., the ναός, altar, and worshipers within (Rev. 11: 1). This seems to refer to the inner-spiritual idea of the Temple in the New Covenant era that supersedes the material Temple of the Old Covenant era. Thus, while judgment is about to be brought upon Israel, Jerusalem, and the literal Temple complex, this prophecy speaks also of the preservation of God's new Temple, the Church (Eph. 2: 19ff.; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:5ff.) that had its birth in and was originally headquartered at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 8:1; 15:2). Notice that after the holocaust, the altar is seen in heaven (Rev. 11:18), whence Christ's kingdom originates ('John 18:36; Heb. 1:3) and where Christians have their citizenship (Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1, 2).

The external court of the Temple complex, however, is not "measured"; it is "cast out" (ἔκβαλε). All the Israelites who refuse the new priesthood of baptism are cast out and their Temple destroyed. The Temple is not destined for preservation, "for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months" (v. 2). The prior prophecy of Christ (Matt. 24:2) absolutely prohibits any expectation of even a partial preservation of the *literal* Temple. Thus, John reveals both the prophetic certainty of the material Temple's destruction and the fact of the preservation of His true Temple, His Church, His New Covenant people, His new priesthood. 45 The proper understanding of the passage requires a mixture of the figurative-symbolic and the literal-historical. This is true in every interpretive approach to the passage, even the attempted literalistic hermeneutic ofdispensationalism. Walvoord writes that "the guiding lines which govern the exposition to follow regard this chapter as a legitimate prophetic utterance in which the terms are taken normally. Hence, the great city of 11:8 is identified as the literal city of Jerusalem."[46] But Walvoord is conspicuously silent on the matter of John's literally climbing the walls of the Temple with

45. As such, Rev. 11:1, 2 functions in the same way as the "sealing of the 144,000" passage in Rev. 7.

46. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 175.

rod in hand and his gathering the worshipers together to measure them. Even fellow premillennialist Mounce notes: "The measuring of the temple is a symbolic way of declaring its preservation."[47] It seems quite apparent that the symbolic mixture involves a contrast between that which is outer and external to the worship of God (i.e., "the court which is outside the Temple" and Jerusalem, v. 2) and that which is internal and essential to the worship of God (i.e., the ναός [the Temple proper], the altar and the worshipers: the Church). The mixture of figurative and literal is neither unprecedented nor uncommon in Scripture (e.g., 2 Kgs. 21:12, 13; Amos 7:8, 9; Isa. 34:1 1; Lam. 2:8; Rev. 18:9-10).

Furthermore, although it is recognized on all sides that there is an obvious involvement of the symbolic in the passage (e.g., the measuring of the ναός, or the innermost portion of the Temple: the Temple proper, Rev. 11: 1), there surely must be some reality that forms the basis of the symbol. After all, the symbolic names "Egypt" and "Sodom" refer to the historical city Jerusalem (Rev. 11:8). If John wrote about literal Jerusalem ("where also their Lord was crucified") twenty-five years after the destruction of the literal Temple (as per the evangelically formulated late date argument), it would seem most improbable that he would speak of the Temple as if it were still standing. The symbol would be confusing in its blatant anachronism. The Temple is required to be standing for the symbolical action of the vision to have any meaning. John uses the future tense when he speaks of the nations' treading down the city. As just stated, this is not a reminiscence of a past event, but rather a future expectation.

All of this becomes all the more apparent when the theme of the book is recalled: Christ is judging Israel for the sin of rejecting Him. Christ-rejecting, Church-persecuting Israel is to be humbled and destroyed. Revelation 11:1, 2 clearly corresponds to the prophecy of Christ as recorded in Luke 21:24. That prophecy (like its parallels in Matt. 24 and Mark 13) is widely held to refer to the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. It is the Lucan record of the Olivet Discourse that specifically speaks of the dismantling of the Temple by terms reflective of those in Revelation 11.

In Luke 21:24 we read: "and they will fall by the edge of the

47. Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 219.

sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and *Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles* until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." Revelation 11 :2b reads: "it [i.e., the holy city, Rev. 11:1] has been given to the *nations*; and they will *tread under foot the holy city* for forty-two months." Here the correspondences are so strong, they bespeak historical identity rather than mere accidental similarity:

Luke 21:24 / Revelation 11:2
Gentiles (ἐθνῶν) = nations (ἔξωθεν)
trampled underfoot (πατουμένη) = tread under foot (πατήσουσιν)

It is evident that John's Revelation and Luke's Gospel look to the same events. And these events were literal occurrences that happened to historical institutions and structures, and that had not already occurred, but that lay in the future for both Jesus (whose words Luke records) and John (in Revelation). The context of Luke demands a literal Jerusalem (Luke 21 :20) besieged by literal armies (Luke21 :20) in literal Judea (Luke 21:21) – which as a matter of indisputable historical record occurred in the events leading up to A.D. 70.

Objections to the Thesis

Despite the above observations, it is frequently argued by many that the Revelation 11 indication of the Temple's existence does not demand a pre-A.D. 70 date. And this for several reasons.

The Objection from Clement of Rome

Both Guthrie and Mounce,[48] for example, argue that Clement of Rome spoke of the Temple as still standing, even though he wrote around A.D. 90+. Clement's relevant statement is as follows: "Let each of you, brethren, in his own order give thanks unto God, maintaining a good conscience and not transgressing the appointed rule of his service, but acting with all seemliness. Not in every place, brethren, are the continual daily sacrifices offered, or the freewill offerings, or the sin offerings and the trespass offerings, but in Jerusalem alone. And even there the offering is not made in every place, but before the sanctuary in the court of the altar; and this too through the high-priest and the aforesaid ministers, after that the victim to

48. Guthrie, *Introduction*, p. 960; Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 35.

be offered bath been inspected for blemishes."[49]

This language in 1 Clement, however, opens the whole question of the actual date of 1 Clement itself. Unfortunately, there is almost as serious a question over the dating of Clement's letter as there is over the dating of Revelation.50 Coxe, who himself opts for an A.D. 97 date for the letter, is quite cautious: "I have reluctantly adopted the opinion that his Epistle was written near the close of his life, and not just after the persecution of Nero."[51] Though Lightfoot accepts the late date of 1 Clement, he recognizes some unusual factors of the letter (which we will consider below) that are quite curious if the letter is to be dated late.[52] Three noteworthy scholars who have opted for an early (A.D. 70) date for Clement are: historians Arthur S. Barnes[53] and George Edmundson,[54] and theologian John A. T. Robinson.[55] Robinson observes in this regard: "Yet in fact its [late date] basis is a great deal weaker than it appears and the case against it has been powerfully stated by Edmundson, whose book seems to have been ignored at this point as at others. . . . The sole question is whether he wrote it when he was bishop or at an earlier stage. Edmundson argues strongly that the evidence points to the latter alternative. "[56]

Let us now look at the leading early date evidences for 1 Clement. If the evidence is compelling, then Clement would be removed as an obstacle to regarding the Temple reference in Revelation as indicating a pre-A.D. 70 date. If it is less than persuasive, however, yet the argument will have served a purpose in at least diminishing the

49. *1 Clement* 41.

50. It seems that though the preponderance of scholarly authority sides for the A.D. 90+ date for *1 Clement*, Guthrie (followed by Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 35) may have overstated the matter when he wrote: "Moreover, Clement of Rome also refers to the temple in the present tense and no-one would suppose because of this that his writing must be dated before A.D. 70," *Introduction*, p. 960. "No-one"?

51. A. Cleveland Coxe, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF]*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [late 19th c.] 1975) 1:1.

52. J. B. Light foot, *The Apostolic Fathers, Part Z: S. Clement of Rome* (London: Macmillan, 1889), p. 352.

53. Arthur S. Barnes, *Christianity at Rome in the Apostolic Age (* Westport, CT Greenwood, [1938] 1971), pp. 209ff.

54. George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First* Century (London: Longman's, Green, 1913), pp. 189ff.

55. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 328.

56. *Ibid.*

effectiveness of the reference to 1 Clement 41 as a tool for undermining the establishment of the above Temple argument in Revelation.

The first line of evidence regards an *ex silentio* matter. If the letter were written after A.D. 90 – when Clement was appointed the bishop of Rome – then an unusual ecclesiastical silence in the letter must be accounted for.

> Even the very existence of a bishop of Rome itself could nowhere be gathered from this letter. Authority indeed is claimed for the utterances of the letter in no faltering tone, but it is the authority of the brotherhood declaring the mind of Christ by the Spirit, not the authority of one man, whether bishop or pope.[57]

Robinson is persuaded by the silence: "At no point in the epistle is appeal made to episcopal authority. . . . Not only is the author not writing as a bishop, but the office of bishop is still apparently synonymous with that of presbyter (42.4f.; 44.1, 4f.; 54.2; 57.1), as in the New Testament and all the other writings we have examined. . . . If this is really the state of affairs in Rome in 96, then we are faced with a very remarkable transition within less than 20 years to that presupposed by the epistles of Ignatius. . . . It is easier to believe that 1 Clement, like the Shepherd of Hermas, reflects an earlier period."5[8] The point is well-taken. The evidence, such as it is, is more suggestive of a pre-bishopric era than for a later era.

Second, it would seem that in Clement's letter the internal evidence is suggestive of a more primitive Christian era.

> In the organisation of the Church only 'bishops and deacons' are mentioned, exactly as they are in St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, while the title 'bishop' is to the same extent interchangeable with that of 'presbyter' as it is in the Acts and Pauline epistles, and the word 'rulers' has the same sense as in the Epistle to the Hebrews.[59]

We can also note reference to Christ as the "child of God," the primitive form of Scripture quotations, the reference to the phoenix (which had been exhibited in Rome under Claudius), and other such matters, all of which lend themselves to the earlier period more

57. Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers, Part I,* p. 352.
58. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 328.
59. Edmundson, *Church in Rem,* p. 192.

readily.[60] Barnes added to these the reference to one Fortunatus (a friend of Paul in 54, cf. 1 Cor. 16:17), the selection of Claudis and Valerius (who were of the household of Claudius the Emperor, according to Lightfoot) as messengers, and other such indications .[61]

Third, in 1 Clement 5:1 we read: "But to pass from the examples of ancient days, let us come to those champions who lived nearest our times. Let us set before us the noble examples which belong to our generation. By reason of jealously and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars of the church were persecuted, and contended even unto death. Let us set before our eyes the good Apostles." Clement thereupon mentions the deaths of Peter and Paul, which indisputably indicates that he is referring to the Neronic persecution. The fact that he mentions the deaths of "the good Apostles" in "our generation" suggests a very recent occurrence that is quite compatible with a date around A.D. 69 or 70. And although possible, the "generation" would be on the outside reach of a date of A.D. 96 (which would be close to thirty years after the events).

Furthermore, it is more than a little interesting that Clement names a few of those who died in the Neronian persecution. In 1 Clement 5 he names Peter and Paul, but also in 1 Clement 6 we read of the names of a couple of other martyrs now virtually unknown, Danaids and Dircae. It is quite remarkable that he cites names of those involved in the Neronian persecution that allegedly occurred about thirty years previous to his own day, but that he is strangely silent about the names of those who died in the Domitianic persecution – even though they are supposed to have been prominent members of his own congregation!

In both sections five and six Clement devotes many sentences to explication of these Neronian woes. But it is quite curious, on the supposition of a Domitianic date, that in 1 Clement 1 he uses only ten words (in the Greek) to refer to the Domitianic persecution, the persecution through which he and many of his friends were allegedly going. That reference reads: "by reason of the sudden and successive troubles and calamities which have befallen us." If the letter were written sometime approaching or in early A.D. 70, however, then the first, fifth, and sixth sections would *all* speak of the Neronian persecu-

60. *Ibid., pp.* 194ff.
61. Barnes, *Christianity at Rome,* pp. 213ff.

tion. In the course of its long history the city of Rome had never witnessed so many "sudden and successive troubles and calamities" among its population generally and for the Christians particularly than in the later Neronian period, the era that eventually issued forth in the chaotic Year of the Four Emperors. Tacitus introduces Rome's history after the death of Nero thus:

> I proceed to a work rich in disasters, full of atrocious battles, of discord and rebellion, yea, horrible even in peace. Four princes killed by the sword; three civil wars, several foreign wars; and mostly raging at the same time. Favorable events in the East [the Jewish War won], unfortunate ones in the West. Illyria disturbed, Gaul uneasy; Britain conquered and soon relinquished; the nations of Sarmatia and Suevia rising against us; the Parthians excited by the deception of a pseudo-Nero. Italy also weighed down by new or oft-repeated calamities; cities swallowed up or buried in ruins; Rome laid waste by conflagrations, the old temples burned up, even the capitol set on fire by citizens; sanctuaries desecrated; adultery rampant in high places. The seas filled with exiles; the rocky islands contaminated with murder. Still more horrible the fury in the city. Nobility, riches, places of honor, whether declined or occupied, counted as crimes, and virtue sure of destruction.[62]

Of this period it truly may be said that "there is scarcely another period in history so full of vice, corruption, and disaster as the six years between the Neronian persecution and the destruction of Jerusalem."[63] Nothing approaching this chaos or even hinting at this level of upheaval was remotely associated with Domitian's death. Combining the Neronian persecution begun in A.D. 64 or 65 with the Roman Civil War in A.D. 68-69, all becomes very clear.

Finally, there is the very Temple reference in question in 1 Clement 41 (cited above). It may be that an "ideal present" is intended by Clement; but all things considered, the reference to the Temple services as if they were still being conducted is best construed as demanding a pre-August, A.D. 70 dating. Edmundson insists that "it is difficult to see how the evidential value of c. xii. can be explained away."[64]

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62. Histories 1:2

63. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:391.

64. Edmundson, *Church in Rome*, p. 193.

It would seem that, at the very least, reference to the statement in 1 Clement 41 cannot discount the possibility of our approach to Revelation 11, in that the date of 1 Clement is in question. And as is probably the case, Clement did write his epistle prior to the Temple's destruction.

The Alleged Silence of Early Christianity

It is objected by a number of scholars that, contrary to what we might expect, early Christian literature did not make much of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. Consequently, it is not a serious matter for John, writing in the A.D. 90s, to make any room for the destruction of the city and Temple that occurred in A.D. 70: "We should expect . . . that an event like the fall of Jerusalem would have dinted some of the literature of the primitive church, almost as the victory at Salamis has marked the *Persae*. It might be supposed that such an epoch-making crisis would even furnish criteria for determining the dates of some of the NT writings. As a matter of fact, the catastrophe is practically ignored in the extant Christian literature of the first century."[65] Or, as put by another scholar: "It is hard to believe that a Judaistic type of Christianity which had itself been closely involved in the cataclysm leading up to A.D. 70 would not have shown the scars – or, alternatively, would not have made capital out of this signal evidence that they, and not non-Christian Judaism, were the true Israel. But in fact our traditions are silent."[66]

At this juncture we will bring forth three points to establish our thesis. We will begin by demonstrating the tenuousness of the assertions of Moffatt and others regarding the first century evidence. Then, we will cite several Jewish works of this era that show the significance of Jerusalem's fall to the Jewish mind. Finally, a long list of sources from later (ante-Nicene) Christian tradition showing the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem for apostolic and early post-apostolic Christendom will be brought forward. Having done this, it should become obvious that a silence on the matter in canoni-

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65. James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 3:3.

66. Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: University Press, 1962), p. 123. In his third edition of the work (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), he has changed his views on this matter.

cal New Testament literature would be most remarkable, especially in a book of the nature of Revelation that deals so frequently with the Jews.

First, let us consider the first century Christian evidence. Much of what Moffatt, the early Moule, and others of their convictions write depends upon the supposition that most of the New Testament was written after A.D. 70. In other words, such a position requires that many of the New Testament books were written after the destruction of Jerusalem, and thus are cases in point that early Christian literature does not mention Jerusalem's fall. C. C. Torrey argues from the perspective that the Gospels and the Apocalypse, at least, were not written after Jerusalem's fall: "It is perhaps conceivable that one evangelist writing after the year 70 might fail to allude to the *destruction of the temple* by the Roman armies (every reader of the Hebrew Bible knew that the Prophets had definitely predicted that foreign armies would surround the city and destroy it), but that *three* (or four) should thus fail is quite incredible. On the contrary, what is shown is that all four Gospels were written *before* the year 70. And indeed, there is no evidence of any sort that will bear examination tending to show that any of the Gospels were written later than about the middle of the century. The challenge to scholars to produce such evidence is hereby presented ."[67] John A. T. Robinson – no conservative zealot, to say the least[68] – has even more recently and very powerfully argued this point: "One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period – the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and with it the collapse of institutional Judaism based on the temple — is never once mentioned as a past fact. "[69] His demonstration that all books of the New Testament should be dated prior to A.D. 70 has swayed a number of careful scholars, Moule among them.[70] Obviously if the entire canon was completed before the destruction of Jerusalem, there would be no historical reference back to the catastrophe!

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67. C. C. Torrey, *The Four Gospels*, 2nd ed. (New York Harper, 1947), p. xiii. Cp. Torrey, *Apocalypse*, p, 86.

68. Robinson, Redating, p. 11: "My position will probably seem surprisingly conservative – especially to those who judge me radical on other is sues." See especially his radical views in his book *Honest to God*.

69. *Ibid., p. 13.*

70. Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, *3rd cd.*, pp. 173ff. Contrast this with the first

1 Clement, too, is oftentimes brought in at this point in the argument as a first century Christian evidence that is silent on Jerusalem's demise. But because of the possible date of writing argued above, 1 Clement cannot be considered as evidence in that it was most probably written before Jerusalem's fall.

With the dismissal of the New Testament canonical books and 1 Clement from consideration, the Moffatt and (early) Moule argument is virtually eliminated. But these are not the only early Christian works available to us. The Epistle of Barnabas is almost certainly a first century Christian work. Lightfoot and Milligan date it between 70 and 79, as do Weizsacker, Hurst, and Bartlet.[71] Schaff, Hilgenfeld, Coxe, and Roberts and Donaldson date it "at the close of the first century. "[72] Reuss, Ewald, Wieseler, and Funk from 79 to 100.[73] Robinson dates it between 75 and 100, and Frend "as early as" A.D. 100.[74]

In Barnabas 4:14 and 5:11 we read the following:

> Moreover understand this also, my brothers. When ye see that after so many signs and wonders wrought in Israel, even then they were abandoned, let us give heed, lest haply we be found, as the scripture saith, many *called but few chosen. . . .*
>
> Therefore the Son of God came in the flesh to this end, that He might sum up the complete tale of their sins against those who persecuted and slew His prophets.

At Barnabas 13:1 we read of the distinction between the Christians and the Jews: "Now let us see whether this people or the first people bath the inheritance, and whether the covenant had reference to us or to them." In Barnabas 16:1 ff. we read of the demise of the Temple:

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edition of this work. See also Cornelis Vanderwaal, Search *the Scriptures,* trans. Theodore Plantinga, vol. 1: *Genesis – Exodus* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia, 1978), p. 11.

71. See Joseph B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1984), pp. 240-241. George L. Hurst, *An Outline of the History of Christian Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1926), p. 11. James Muilenburg, *The Literary Relations of the Epistle of Barnabas and the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (Marburg: Yale, 1921), p. 2. For Milligan, see Schaff, *History* 2:678n.

72. Schaff, *History* 2:678; Coxe, *ANF* 1: 133; Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF* 1:135.

73. For bibliographic references see Schaff, *History* 2:678n.

74. Robinson, *Redating,* pp. 313iTj W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), p. 37.

"Moreover I will tell you likewise concerning the temple, how these wretched men being led astray set their hope on the building, and not on their God that made them, as being a house of God. . . . So it cometh to pass; for because they went to war it was pulled down by their enemies. . . . Again, it was revealed how the city and the temple and the people of Israel should be betrayed. For the scripture saith; and it shall be in the last days, that the Lord shall deliver up the sheep of the pasture and the fold and the tower thereof to destruction." It is indisputably clear that Barnabas makes much of the fact of Jerusalem's fall as an apologetic for Christianity.

Ignatius wrote around 107.[75] And although clear and explicitly detailed reference is not made to Jerusalem's fall in Ignatius's letters, there is what seems to be an allusion to the matter. In the Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians 10 we read: "It is absurd to speak ofJesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end." With the demise of the Temple, Judaism is incapable of worshiping in the manner prescribed in the Law of God; it has come to an end. This is used by Ignatius to enhance the role of Christianity against that of now defunct *Bible-based Judaism.*

Justin Martyr wrote his *The First Apology of Justin* about A.D. 147.[76] Thus, it is less than fifty years past the first century. In this work we read at *1 Apology* 32:

> And the prophecy, "He shall be the expectation of the nations," signified that there would be some of all nations who should look for Him to come again. And this indeed you can see for yourselves, and be convinced of by fact. For of all races of men there are some who look for Him who was crucified in Judea, and after whose crucifixion the land was straightway surrendered to you as spoil of war. And the prophecy, "binding His foal to the vine, and washing His robe in the blood of the grape," was a significant symbol of the things that were to happen to Christ, and of what He was to do. For the foal of an ass stood bound to a vine at the entrance of a village, and He ordered His acquaintances to bring it to Him then; and when it was brought, He mounted and sat upon it, and entered Jerusalem, where was the vast temple of the Jews which was afterwards destroyed by you.[77]

75. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 917.
76. Schaff, *History* 2:716.
77. *ANF 1:173.*

Here Justin clearly ties in the destruction of Judea with the crucifixion of Christ, as effect is tied to cause. In *1 Apology* 47 he argues that the destruction of Jerusalem was prophesied in the Old Testament.[78] In chapter 53 he makes the Christian message very explicitly depend upon Jerusalem's demise: "For with what reason should we believe of a crucified man that He is the first-born of the unbegotten God, and Himself will pass judgment on the whole human race, unless we had found testimonies concerning Him published before He came and was born as man, and unless we saw that things had happened accordingly — the devastation of the land of the Jews."[79] In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, chapters 16 and 40, he uses this historical fact again.[80]

In Book 1 of the Sibylline Oracles we have what Collins calls "an original Jewish oracle and an extensive Christian redaction."[81] An important part of the Christian redaction is found in the section 1:324-400. Unfortunately, the evidence for the date of this entire Sibylline oracle is "scanty and less than conclusive." But at 1:324-400, although there is some debate, the "consensus of scholars" is that even the section 1:387-400 is part of the Christian redaction.[82] Collins expresses agreement with the conclusions of A. M. Kurfess,[83] writing that "since no other historical event is mentioned after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Christian redaction should probably be dated no later than A.D. 150."[84] This put the Christian section, which is significant for our inquiry, quite close to the first century witness.

Sibylline Oracles 1:360-364, 387-400 reads:

> And then Israel,' intoxicated, will not perceive
> nor yet will she hear, afflicted with weak ears.
> But when the raging wrath of the Most High
> comes upon the Hebrews
> it will also take faith away from them,

78. *ANF 1:178.*
79. *ANF* 1:180.
80. ANF 1:202,215.
81. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:330.
82. *Ibid.* 1:331.
83. A. M. Kurfess, in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 40 *(1941):* 165. Cited in Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:332n.
84. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:332.

> because they did harm to the son of the heavenly God. . . .
>
> Then when the Hebrews reap the bad harvest,
> a Roman king will ravage much gold and silver.
> Thereafter there will be other kingdoms
> continuously, as kingdoms perish
> and they will afflict mortals. But there will be
> a great fall for those men when they launch on unjust haughtiness.
> But when the temple of Solomon falls in the illustrious land
> cast down by men of barbarian speech
> with bronze breastplates, the Hebrews will be driven from their land;
> wandering, being slaughtered, they will mix much darnels in their wheat.
> There will be evil strife for all men;
> and the cities, violated in turn,
> will weep for each other on receiving the wrath of the great
> God in their bosom, since they committed an evil deed.[85]

Collins notes the reference to the Roman king and states that it is "an obvious reference to the defeat of the Jews in A.D. 70"; he further notes that the reference to Solomon's Temple in verse 393 "refers to the same event."[86] Here is a clear Christian reference – and assuredly an early one — to the destruction of Jerusalem as a vindication of Christianity and a judgment on the Jews for harming "the son of the heavenly God."

Second, the Jewish writers of this era (and shortly thereafter) feel the pain and anguish of the loss of Jerusalem, a pain that cannot but be useful to those who follow the One who prophesied its destruction, Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:2, parallels).

2 Esdras is almost certainly to be dated about the year 100 in its original form. This date is argued by such noted scholars as G. H.

85. *Ibid.* 1:343f.
86. *Ibid. 1 :344n.*

Box, J. M. Myers, Robinson, and Bruce M. Metzger.[87] Such a date rests upon solid evidence. In 2 Esdras 3:1 we read: "In the thirtieth year after the downfall of the City I Salathiel – who am also Ezra – was in Babylon, and as I lay on my bed I was disquieted." Of this statement it can be noted that "we are, therefore, justified in concluding that the date, like other features in S, was intended to bear a typical significance, and that it typifies the thirtieth year after the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, i.e., the year 100 A.D. Consequently S maybe regarded as having been originally written and put forth in 100 A.D."[88]

In 2 Esdras, the writer is greatly troubled by the destruction of Jerusalem and the wealth of Rome (cryptically designated "Babylon"). 2 Esdras 3:2ff. reads: "I was troubled as I lay on my bed, and my thoughts welled up in my heart, because I saw the desolation of Zion and the wealth of those who lived in Babylon. My spirit was greatly agitated, and I began to speak anxious words to the Most High." After noting God's justice upon Adam's sin (3:4ff.), upon the wicked in Noah's day (3:8ff.), and upon Egypt (3: 17ff.), he asks: "Then I said in my heart, Are the deeds of those who inhabit Babylon any better? Is that why she has gained dominion over Zion? For when I came here I saw ungodly deeds without number, and my soul has seen many sinners during these thirty years." The writer laments the historical fact that Rome inhabits Jerusalem and Israel has been overthrown. This lamentation of Israel's fate occupies his attention from 3:1 through 5:19.

A work very similar to 2 Esdras in many respects is the Jewish work 2 Baruch. It is probably to be dated in the second or third decade of the second century.89 In 2 Baruch 1:1-5 the author opens with a "prophecy" of the "coming" destruction of Jerusalem that is explained as a divine means of chastening Israel. This *ex eventu* "prophecy" illustrates the significance of Jerusalem's demise to the early Jews, the first persecutors of Christianity.

In Sibylline Oracles 4 ("a political oracle from the Hellenistic age

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87. G. H. Box, The *Ezra-Apocalypse* (London: Pitman, 1912), p. xxix. J. M. Myers, Z and *II Esdras: Introduction, Translation and Commentary.* Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY Doubleday, 1974), pp. 129ff. Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 247, 315. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in *OTP* 1:520.

88. Box, *Ezra-Apocalypse*, p. xxix.

89. A. F. J. Klijn, "2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch," in *OTP 1:617.*

updated by a Jew in the late first century A. D.")[90] there is a clear sign of Jewish redaction relative to the destruction of Jerusalem. "All scholars agree that it was written shortly after the last datable event mentioned — therefore about A.D. 80."[91] At 4:115ff. we read:

> An evil storm of war will also come upon
> Jerusalem
> from Italy, and it will sack the great Temple of
> God>
> whenever they put their trust in folly and cast off
> piety
> and commit repulsive murders in front of the
> Temple. . . .
> A leader of Rome will come to Syria who will burn
> the Temple of Jerusalem with fire, at the same
> time slaughter
> many men and destroy the great land of the Jews
> with its broad roads.
> Then indeed an earthquake will destroy at once
> Salamis and Paphos
> when the dark water overwhelms Cyprus, which
> is washed by many waves.[92]

The pain and shock overwhelming the Jewish writer at the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is evident. And the apparent vindication of Israel is urged by the destruction wreaked by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.

Sibylline Oracles 5 is "an important witness to at least one strand of Egyptian Judaism" that was written at a "date in the last years of the first century A. D."[93] It, too, speaks of Jerusalem's destruction and expects divine judgment upon Rome for it (5: 137-178, 397ff.).

In the Apocalypse of Abraham we have another Jewish witness of early date. R. Rubinkiewicz writes that "it is commonly held that our pseudepigraphon was composed at the end of the first century

90. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP 1:381.*
91. Ibid. 1:382.
92. *Sibylline Oracles* 4115-118, 125-129; in *ibid.*, 1:387.
93. Ibid. 1:391, 390.

A. D."[94] J. H. Charlesworth, in his editorial emendation to the article by Rubinkiewicz, writes that: "our pseudepigraphon was written after A.D. 70, because the author describes the destruction of Jerusalem (cf. ch. 27). Hence, the apocalypse – that is the early Jewish stratum – was composed sometime after A.D. 70 and before the middle of the second century. "9[5] G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman concur.[96] L. Ginzberg places it in "the last decades of the first century."[97]

It is important to bear in mind that: "the Apocalypse of Abraham is one of the most important works written after the destruction of the nation in A.D. 70. The importance of the apocalypse can be compared to that of 2 Baruch or 4 Ezra, but our author analyzes the causes of the destruction of Jerusalem from a different perspective: The defeat was caused by the infidelity of Israel toward the covenant with God and the opportunistic politics of some leaders. "9[8] In chapter 27:1-6 we read of this Jewish lamentation over Jerusalem:

> And I looked and I saw, and behold the picture swayed. And from its left side a crowd of heathens ran out and they captured the men, women, and children who were on its right side. And some they slaughtered and others they kept with them. Behold, I saw (them) running to them by way of four ascents and they burned the Temple with fire, and they plundered the holy things that were in it. And I said, "Eternal One, the people you received from me are being robbed by the hordes of the heathen. They are killing some and holding others as aliens, and they burned the Temple with fire and they are stealing and destroying the beautiful things which are in it. Eternal, Mighty One! If this is so, why now have you afflicted my heart and why will it be so?"

Clearly this first century Jewish work despairs over the fall of Jerusalem. Of course, it does not attribute it to the Jewish role in the crucifixion of Christ, but it does illustrate again that the fall had a tremendous impact on the minds and affections of post-fall Judaism. This impact was not overlooked by the Christian tradition, as we

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94. R. Rubinkiewiez, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *ibid.* 1:683.

95. See *ibid.* 1:683.

96. G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: Pitman, 1918), p. xv ff.

97. L. Ginzberg, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York KTAV, 1953-1968) 1:92.

98. Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," *OTP* 1:685.

have seen already and will again see next.

Third, the later ante-Nicene Christian tradition is replete with references to the significance of the fall of Jerusalem. It seems that only today is that significance not comprehended. The following survey is based on the ten volume series entitled *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson and jointly republished by T. & T. Clark and Eerdmans. Any references given hereinafter should be understood to refer to the appropriate volume of this series. Because of the great variety of references, only a few will be quoted; the large majority will simply be referenced.

Melito of Sardis flourished c. 160-180.[99] In the fragments of his work we read of his words against the Jews for cruelly crucifying Christ. At the end of a lengthy section detailing their error, he writes: "Thou smotest thy Lord: thou also hast been smitten upon the earth. And thou indeed liest dead; but He is risen from the place of the dead, and ascended to the height of heaven." [100]

Hegesippus flourished c. 170-175.10] We have preserved in the fragments of his *Commentaries on the Acts* a record of the martyrdom of James the Just by the Jews, in which he says: "And so he suffered martyrdom; and they buried him on the spot, and the pillar erected to his memory still remains, close by the Temple. This man was a true witness to both Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Christ. . . . And shortly after that Vespasian besieged Judaea, taking them captive "[102] He ties in the persecution of Christ's apostle James to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Clement of Alexandria, writing either at about A.D. 190[103] or A.D. 200[104] mentions Jerusalem's fall in his *Miscellanies* 1:21.'05 There he relates the fall to a fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of "Seventy Weeks." The relevant portion of the reference reads as follows: "The half of the week Nero held sway, and in the holy city Jerusalem placed the abomination; and in the half of the week he was taken

99. Schaff, *History* 2:73% Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity,* 2 vols., trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985)1:418; Frend, The *Rise of Christianity,* p. 240.

100. For text, see *ANF* 8:757.

101. See *ANF* 8:762; Schaff, *History* 2:743; Frend, *Rise of Christianity,* p. 921.

102. Hegesippus, Commentaries on *the Acts. See ANF* 8:763.

103. Frend, *Rise of Christianity,* p. 190.

104. William Wilson, in *ANF* 2:168.

105. *ANF* 2:329.

away, and Otho, and Galba, and Vitellius. And Vespasian rose to the supreme power, and destroyed Jerusalem, and desolated the holy place. And that such are the facts of the case, is clear to him that is able to understand, as the prophet [i.e., Daniel] said." He mentions it again several pages later in the same book and chapter, again relating it to Daniel's prophecy.[106] Thus, Clement ties the fall of Jerusalem to God's divine intervention in judgment upon Israel by prophetic decree.

In *Miscellanies 4:15* he quotes *The Preaching of Peter,* which ties the fall of Jerusalem into the rejection of Christ by the Jews: "Whence also Peter, in his *Preaching,* speaking of the apostles, says: 'But we, unrolling the books of the prophets which we possess, who name Jesus Christ, partly in parables, partly in enigmas, partly expressly and in so many words, find His coming and death, and cross, and all the rest of the tortures which the Jews inflicted on Him, and His resurrection and assumption to heaven previous to the capture of Jerusalem. As it is written, *These things are all that He behooves to suffer, and what should be after Him.* Recognizing them, therefore, we have believed in God in consequence of what is written respecting Him.' "[107] In quoting this earlier work, Clement provides a double indication of the significance of the fall of Jerusalem, his own and that from Peter's *Preaching.*

Other early references to Jerusalem's fall include the following:

Tertullian (d. 220):
Apology, chapter 21 (*ANF* 3:34), chapter 26 (*ANF* 3:40);
An Answer to the Jews, chapter 3 *(ANF 3: 154),* chapter 8 *(ANF* 158ff.), chapter 13 *(ANF* 3:168ff.);
Against Marcion 3:23 *(ANF* 3:341ff.), *439 (ANF* 3:415ff.).

The Recognitions of Clement (dated c. pre-211) 1081:44 *(ANF* 8:94).

The Clementine Homilies (dated c. first part of third century) 1093:15 *(ANF* 8:241).

Lactantius (A.D. 260-330):
The Divine Institutes 421 (ANF 7:123-124);
The Epitome of the Divine Institutes 46 (*ANF 7:241).*

106. *ANF* 2:334.
107. *ANF* 2:510.
108. Thomas Smith, "Recognitions of Clement," in *ANF* 874.
109. M. B. Riddle, "Introductory Notice to the Pseudo-Clementine Literature" in *ANF* 8:70.

The Constitution of the Holy Apostles (*c.* second half of third century) [110] 6:2:5 (*ANF* 7:451) and 6:5:25 (*ANF* 7:461).

Conclusion

Interestingly, one of the most datable events of ancient history is the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Christian and pagan sources alike, as well as archaeological data, point to A.D. 70 very clearly. The fall of the Temple and of Jerusalem were major events in the history of not only Judaism but also Christianity. Early Christians made much of this, employing it as an apologetic datum. It has been shown that at the time of the writing of Revelation the Temple complex is spoken of as still standing. It is inconceivable that a book of the nature of Revelation could fail to mention its already having been destroyed, if Revelation were written after A.D. 70. This evidence, along with that regarding the reign of the sixth king that preceded, form unsurpassable barriers to a date post-A.D. 70.

110. The date of *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* is much disputed, Von Drey held to the date indicated (*ANF* 7:388), as did Schaff (*History* 2:185) and Hamack (*ANF* 7:388).

12

THE ROLE OF NERO CAESAR

In an earlier section we demonstrated that the reference to the seven kings in Revelation 17 indicated that the sixth king was presently ruling when John wrote the book. There we showed that the sixth king must have been Nero Caesar, in that he was the sixth emperor of the Roman Empire. At this point we turn to a further consideration of evidences of Nero's appearance in Revelation.

The **Gematria** *"666"*

One of the best known features of Revelation among the general Christian populace today is also one of its most misunderstood. That feature is the gematria riddle in Revelation 13.[1] There is a widespread awareness of and interest in this intriguing passage of Revelation 13:18, which says: "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six." In order to gain a proper conception of this verse, a little historical and cultural background will be necessary.

Ancient Numerical Riddles

In ancient days alphabets served a two-fold purpose. Their first and foremost design was, of course, their service as letters from which words were composed in written communication. But in the second place, letters were also assigned numerical values and thus served as numerals. The most familiar example of this dual function of alpha-

1. Mounce suggests that "no verse in Revelation has reeeived more attention than this one with its cryptic referenee to the number of the beast" (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New International Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977], p. 263).

bets can be found in the Roman numeral system. In Roman numerals the letter I possessed the numerical value of 1; V was 5; X was 10; C was 100; D was 500; and so forth. The Greek and Hebrew languages operated similarly, although their numerical equivalents followed the alphabetic order and employed the entire alphabet.[2]

Because of the two-fold use of letters as both alphabets and numbering systems, cryptogrammic riddles were common in ancient cultures. Cryptograms involved the adding up of the numerical values of the letters of a word, particularly a proper name.[3] In Greek these riddles were called ἰσοψέφια ("numerical equality"); in Rabbinic Hebrew such cryptograms were known as "gematria" (from the Hebrew word for "mathematical").4 By the very nature of the case cryptograms almost invariably involved a riddle. This can be seen in that the word very simply could have been spelled out, and also in that any particular arithmetical value could fit a number of words or names.

Zahn provides us an example of a cryptogram discovered in excavations from Pompeii, which was buried by volcanic eruption in A.D. 79. In Greek the inscription written was: φιλῶ ἧς ἀριθμός φμε ("I love her whose number is 545").

> The name of the lover is concealed; the beloved will know it when she recognises her name in the sum of the numerical value of the 3 letters φμε, i.e., 545(@ = 500 + μ = 40 + ε = 5). But the passing stranger does not know in the very least who the beloved is, nor does the 19th century investigator know which of the many Greek feminine names she bore. For he does not know how many letters there are in the name which gives us the total of 545 when added numerically.[5]

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2. For Greek, see W. G. Rutherford, *The First Greek Grammar* (London: 1935), pp. 143ff. For Hebrew see E. Kautzsch, cd., *Gesenius' Hebrew* Grammar, 28th cd., trans. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946), p. 30. See individual alphabetic entries in G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the Nero Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), *ad. 10C.;* and Joseph H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New* York: American Book, 1889), *ad. 10C.*

3. Irenaeus mentions this phenomenon in his *Against Heresies 5:30:1* (although this statement is probably by a later copyist): "numbers also are expressed by letters."

4. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation.* Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), p. 225.

5. Cited in Oskar Ruble, "ἀριθμέω" in Gerhard Kittel, cd., *Theological* Dictionary *of the* New *Testament [TDNT]*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 462. See also Miller Burrows, *What Mean These Stones? (New* Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1941), p. 270.

In Suetonius's *Lives of the Twelve Caesars we* have recorded an interesting cryptogram from the first century. In the midst of his Latin history, Suetonius records a sample of a Greek lampoon that was circulated after the burning of Rome: "*Νεόψηφον· Νέρων ἰδίαν μητέρα ἀπέκτεινε*" ("A calculation new. Nero his mother slew.")[6] It is interesting to note that "the numerical value of the Greek letters in Nero's name (1005) is the same as that of the rest of the sentence; hence we have an equation, Nero= the slayer of one's own mother.'" An additional example, also employing Nero's name, can be found in the Sibylline Oracles:

> One who has fifty as an initial will be commander,
> A terrible snake, breathing out grievous war, who one day will lay hands on his own family and slay them, and throw everything into confusion,
> athlete, charioteer, murderer, one who dares ten thousand things.[8]

Here Nero's initial is recorded as possessing the value of 50.

Still another example is found in the Christian Sibylline Oracles (c. 150):

> Then indeed the son of the great God will come,
> incarnate, likened to mortal men on earth,
> bearing four vowels, and the consonants in him are two.
> I will state explicitly the entire number for you.
> For eight units, and equal number of tens in addition to these, and eight hundreds will reveal the name.[9]

As the translator notes: "*Iesous* [Jesus] has a numerical equivalence of 888."[10]

A few additional early Christian references showing the alphabetic evaluation of numbers can be mentioned. In Barnabas, chapter 9, "Barnabas" derives the name of Christ and the fact of the cross from the number of men Abraham circumcised in his household. In his day Irenaeus dealt with certain heresies based on mystic num-

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6. Suetonius, Nero 39:2.

7. Suetonius, *Lines of the Twelve Caesars*, vol. 2, trans. J. C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge Harvard, 1913), p. 158.

8. *Sibylline Oracles 5:28-31.* In James H. Charlesworth, cd., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2* vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:393.

9. *Sibylline Oracles* 1:324-329; *OTP 1:342.*

10. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:342.

hers.'[11] Tertullian sees in Gideon's choice of 300 men a cryptic reference to the letter "T," which signifies the sign of the cross.[12]

Of ancient cryptograms we should note that there are "countless examples from classical and Hellenistic and indeed Rabbinic literature."[13] Caird points out several specific examples of gematria in rabbinic writings,[14] while Eduard Reuss writes: "The mechanism of the problem [i.e., the problem in Revelation 13: 18] is based upon one of the cabalistic artifices in use in Jewish hermeneutics, which consisted in calculating the numerical value of the letters composing a word. This method, called *gehmatria*, or geometrical, that is, mathematical, [was] used by the Jews in the exegesis of the Old Testamerit."[15] The point is clear: cryptograms were common among the ancients, even among Christians. Hence, the gematria in Revelation is not something created *de novo* by John; rather, the idea involved a familiar concept to the ancients.

The Textual Variant

Another introductory matter undoubtedly of significance in determining the identity of this "666" is the matter of the textual variant in the Greek of Revelation 13:18. Although both the strongest manuscript evidence and intrinsic probability are supportive of the reading "666,"[16] there is some slight manuscript and historical evidence for the number "616."

Instead of ἑφήκοντα, which is strongly supported by p^{47} ℵ A P 046

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11. Against Heresies 2:24:1 ff., written ca. 185,

12. *Carm. adv. Marc*, 3:4. Cited in Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York: Cassells, *1884)*, p. *469 n. 1.*

13. Rühle, "αριθμεξ," *TDNT 1:462.*

14. *G.* B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New* York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 174. See the Babylonian Talmud: *Yoma* 20a; *Nazir 5' ; Sanhedrin 22'; Uzkin* 12.

15. Eduard Reuss, *History of Christian Theology in the Apostolic Age*, cited in J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1887] rep, 1983), p. 557.

16. The number 666 is accepted by the committees of all the major Greek New Testaments, to wit: Eberhard Nestle, cd., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 25th ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1963), p. 638; R. V. G. Tasker, cd., *The Greek New Testament, Being the Text Translated in the New English Bible 1961* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 396; *The Textus Receptus* (London: Billing and Sons, 1967), p. 614; Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, *et. al.*, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Münster: West Germany, 1975), p. 869; and Zane C. Hodges and Arthur 1.. Farstad, eds., *The Greek* New *Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), p. 765.

051 all extant minuscule it^{gig} vg $syr^{ph,h}$ $cop^{sa,bo}$ armal, δέκα is read by C some manuscripts known to Irenaeus (who, however, says that 666 is found "in all good and ancient copies," and is "attested by those who had themselves seen John face to face"), and $Tyconius^{pt}$. According to Tischendorfs 8th cd., the numeral 616 was also read by two minuscule manuscripts which unfortunately are no longer extant (nos. 5 and 11; cf. C. R. Gregory, *Prolegomena*, p. 676). When Greek letters are used as numerals the difference between 666 and 616 is merely a change from ξ to z (666 = χξς and 616 = χις).[17]

Irenaeus's reference to the variation is as follows:

> Such, then, being the state of the case, and this number [i.e., 666] being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse], and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it] . . . I do not know how it is that some have erred following the ordinary mode of speech, and have vitiated the middle number in the name, deducting the amount of fifty from it, so that instead of six decads they will have it that there is but one. Others then received this reading without examination; some in their simplicity, and upon their own responsibility, making use of this number expressing one decad; while some, in their experience, have ventured to seek out a name which should contain the erroneous and spurious number. [18]

Although the manuscript evidence for the variant is relatively sparse, the very fact that it exists is significant. "The reading thus curtly dismissed [by Irenaeus] gained so good a footing that it survives in one of our best uncials and in two cursives, and in the commentary of the Pseudo-Augustine, where the writer probably [follows] Tyconius."[19] Thus, although it is certain that the original

17. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual* Commentary on *the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 197 1), pp. 751-752. Punctuation standardized.

18. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies 5:30:1*. There is an interpolation in the Latin manuscript which is omitted in the Greek of Eusebius's record of it (*Eccl. Hist.* 5:8), which adds: "I am inclined to think that this occurred through the fault of the copyists, as is wont to happen, since numbers also are expressed by letters; so that the Greek letter which expresses the number sixty was easily expanded into the letter Iota of the Greeks." Most patristic scholars believe this to be added by a hand other than Irenaeus's. See Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF],* 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [late 19th c.] 1975) 1:558 n. 4.

19. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. 175.

reading of Revelation was properly "666," it is remarkable that "616" appeared in certain ancient manuscripts and traditions dating back to the second century. The significance of this variant in the text tradition will be dealt with shortly.

The Meaning of 666

Perhaps in the inquiry into the significance of the cryptogram it would be best to begin with the position the present writer deems most compatible with the available evidence. After presenting the case for the identification of *"666,"* then some of the problems with the designation will be dealt with. A compelling case can be made that the referent of 666 is none other than the infamous tyrant Nero Caesar. Now although the entire weight of the argument for the date of the Revelation can not be borne by this identification alone, when the probable identification of "666" as "Nero Caesar" is made, then the complex of evidences considered together is seen to cohere most impressively.

As we begin our inquiry we must bear in mind that John clearly says "the number of the beast" is "the number of a man" (Rev. 13: 18). Thus, this beast, despite the apocalyptic imagery used to describe him, is a man (Gk: ἄνθρωπος) – not an angelic or demonic being, or a non-human creature of some sort, or an idea.[20] The beast imagery describes his cruel character, not his physical form.

As a great many scholars have come to conclude with a satisfying degree of confidence, the name which fits the circumstances most admirably is that of the nefarious Nero Caesar. And as noted just above, it would not be the first time Nero was the subject of a cryptogram. Earlier we noted a riddle based on the Greek spelling of his name. Here we must realize that the name "Nero Caesar," if spelled according to a Hebrew spelling (John and most first century Christians were of Hebrew extraction),[21] gives us precisely the value

20. "The number of the beast is the number of a certain man. . . . The reference is undoubtedly to some definite historical person" (Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 264). "The man here, i.e. one of the heads of the Beast, is himself the Beast. If we discover the name of the man it is for the time the name of the Beast. This conclusion is of paramount importance in the interpretation of the verse as a whole" (R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 2 vols. International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920] 1:365).

21. See discussion below of the strong Hebrew element in Revelation.

666. An ancient Hebrew or Aramaic spelling of "Nero Caesar" (although not the most common one), was "*Nrwn Qsr*," which can be enumerated as follows:

נ=50 ר=200 *1 = 6* נ=50 ק=100 ס=60 ר=200

thus:

נרון קסר=666

According to Stuart, Professor Benary of Berlin noted long ago that in the Talmud and other Rabbinical writings Nero was spelled thus.[22] In fact, "the secret [i.e., the Neronic identity of the referent of 666] has been almost simultaneously rediscovered of late years by Fritzsche in Halle, by Benary in Berlin, by Reuss in Strasbourg, and by Hitzig in Heidelberg."[23] Although it is true that "Caesar" was often spelled in the Rabbinic literature with an additional letter , Hort notes that there is "excellent authority" for the precise spelling required .24 The same observation was made by Jastrow[25] and Ewald.[26] Indeed, even were there no such evidence, Swete observes that Revelation's spelling would be quite acceptable as a cipher.[27] But today hard archaeological documentary evidence for just such a spelling of Nero's name has been found in a Murabba'at document of the Qumran community.

> It may now be pointed out that in an Aramaic document from Murabba'at . . . , dated to the "second year of the emperor Nero," the name is spelled נרון קסר as required by the theory [i.e., that 666 signifies Nero]. The last two consonants of קסר are damaged, but enough is preserved to show that no vowel-letter was written between the ק and ם.[28]

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22. Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, *2* vols. (Andover Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 2:457.

23. Farrar, *Early Days*, p.471 n. 4.

24. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xxxi.

25. Mareus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New* York: Paroles, 1950).

26. H. A. Ewald, Die *Johann. Schriften*, 2:203 (cited in Farrar, *Early Days*, p. 471 n. 4).

27. Swete, *Revelation,* p. 176.

28, D. R. Hillers, "Revelation 13:18 and A Scroll from Murabba'at," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 170* (Apr. 1963):65. The evidence can be seen by consulting the French work edited by P. Benoit, J. T. Milik, and R. DeVaux, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert of Jordan II* (Oxford, 1961), p. 18, plate 29.

Although wide-ranging scholarly consensus is certainly not the *sine qua non* of truth, it should be noted that a good number of noted scholars have accepted this identity as designating Nero. Milligan, who considered the designation to be "impossible,"[29] listed the following scholars of his day as holding to the Nero postulate: Fritzsche, Benary, Hitzig, Reuss, Ewald, Baur, Zeller, Hilgenfeld, Volkmar, Hausrath, Krenkel, Gebhardt, Renan, Abbe, Reville, Sabatier, Davidson, Stuart, Bleek, Beyschlag, Farrar, and Cowles.[30] Other scholars who have affirmed this view include: J. Stuart Russell, Shirley Jackson Case, George Edmundson, B. W. Henderson, Arthur S. Peake, Martin Kiddie, Charles C. Torrey, John Bright, Austin Farrer, G. Driver, D. R. Hillers, Bo Reicke, J. P. M. Sweet, Bruce M. Metzger, and John A. T. Robinson, to name but a few.[31] Weigall undoubtedly goes too far when he claims that "scholarship is pretty well unanimous" on this identification.[32] Henderson is a bit more fair to the opposition when he states that the "'number of the Beast' is now fairly generally admitted to be 666 because this = *Neron kaisar* transliterated into Hebrew. "[33] In either case, Morris's statement that of all the solutions put forward "none has won wide acceptance"[34] seems quite mistaken. "The most probable view still remains that most generally accepted, that the writer intended Nero Caesar in Hebrew letters."[35] Thus, "many are the solutions offered, some of

29. William Milligan, *Discussions on the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 115.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

31. Russell, *Parousia*, p. 557. Shirley Jackson Case, *The Revelation of John: A History of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1919), p. 319. George Edmundson, The *Church in Rome in the First Century* (London: Longman's, Green, 1913), pp. 165-166. B. W. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors* (Cambridge: University Press, 1927), p. 45. Arthur S. Peake, The *Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919), p. 326. Martin Kiddie, *The Revelation of St. John (New* York: Harper, 1940), p. 261. Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John (New* Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 60. John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville Abingdon, 1963), p. 240. Austin Farrer, *The* Revelation *of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), pp. 158ff. G. Driver, *The Judean Scrolls* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), p. 374. Hillers, "Revelation 13:18," p. 65. See J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation.* Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia Westminster, 1979) p. 218, note u. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1968), p. 752. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 235.

32. Arthur Weigall, Nero: *Emperor of Rome* (London: Butterworth, 1933), p. 298.

33. B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London: Methuen, 1903), p. 440. Robinson calls it "far the most widely accepted solution" (Robinson, *Redating,* p. 235).

34. Leon Morns, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 174.

35. Peake, *Revelation,* p. 326. This conclusion was reached after twelve pages of discussion.

them completely absurd, and none as convincing as 'Nero Caesar'. "[36]

It must be remembered that the referent of 666 must not only fit the gematria valuation (as a number of names could), but it must fit it in a *relevant* way. 37 We should not forget that Revelation was written to first century Christians under severe "tribulation" (Rev. 1:9; 2:22; 6:10). Hence, Morris's objection that "the possibilities are almost endless "3[8] is not really valid, for it must be that the possibilities are to be limited to the era in which John wrote – whichever date is chosen. The name "Nero" well meets the three fundamental criteria: proper numerical valuation, reference to a man (Rev. 13: 18), and contemporary relevancy.

There are several other factors that we can bring to bear that fill out and enhance the Nero/Beast theory in a most interesting way. These include the textual variant, as well as several incidental allusions that minutely correspond with the Nero/Beast imagery.

The Textual Variant "616"

As mentioned previously, although the number 666 is the undeniably certain reading of the original autograph, there is an intriguing textual variant that appeared very early in Revelation's manuscript history. That variant preserved the number of the Beast as "616." There is not only some slight manuscript evidence for this variant, but also the historical record of it in Irenaeus and the Donatist Tyconius. 39 Upon a careful consideration of this variant, we can fairly draw the conclusion that this variant points to Nero as well.

In the discipline of textual criticism, the critic's task is to discover the original reading of a handwritten text by analysis of available

36. Kiddie, *Revelation,* p. 261.

37. One vain and amusing attempt at relevance by a futurist is found in a dispensational work by Raymond Schafer: "At all times Satan has had to have one or more Antichrist candidates waiting in the wings, lest the Rapture come suddenly and find him unprepared. That is why so many malevolent world leaders have had names whose letters added up to 666 when combined in certain ways. (Depending *on* which 666 formula is used, at any given moment there are several hundred thousand men in the world whose names added up to 666. It is from this large pool of candidates that Satan has traditionally chosen his 'man of the moment')" (Schafer, *After the Rapture* [Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1977], p. 55).

38. Morris, Revelation, p. 174.

39. See textual apparatus, ad. *10C.*, in Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, *et.* al, *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (London: United Bible Societies, 1975), p. 869. Also see Metzger, *Textual Commentary,* pp. 751-752.

copies of that text. The critic often is forced to do so on the basis of various probability factors presented by the whole array of manuscript evidence. Textual variants necessarily fall into two broad groups: those that arise by accident and those that arise by intention.[40] There are various ways by which *accidental variants* can mar the text. There are errors of sight, caused by a confusion of similarly drawn letters; errors of writing, where a scribe inadvertently writes one letter for another; errors of hearing (especially when a text is being dictated to copyists) due to the similarity of sounds between certain letters, diphthongs, etc.; and errors of judgment, where, for example, an abbreviated word might have been put into the wrong unabbreviated form. *Intentional variants* can occur for any number of reasons and these reasons are more difficult to discern But "for the most part" they are derived "from attempts by scribes to improve the text in various ways."[41]

The two leading options before the textual critic[42] in the present instance are 666 and 616. In the earlier extant manuscripts the number is written out in words that are quite different: "six hundreds and sixty-six" is written: ἑξακόσιοι ἑξήκοντα ἑξ; "six hundreds and sixteen" is written: ἑξακόσιοι δέκα ἑξ. Or, as in some of the later manuscripts — and almost certainly in the original — the variant numbers are written thus: 666 appears as χξς; and 616 appears as χις. The letters in question are ξ (60) and ι (10). Immediately the Greek student recognizes the difficulty of an accidental confusion accounting for the divergence. It is difficult to see how an error of sight, sound, writing, or judgment could explain the variant; the letters are as different in style, size, and sound as any two Greek letters could be.[43] Obviously the variant is of the intentional class. But why?

Although such a problem is necessarily difficult to trace down, a strong case can be made for an early copyist's intentionally altering the number in order to make the discerning of the referent easier. If

40. J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 63.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

42. There is one other extremely improbable variant: 606. See Ford, *Revelation,* p. 226, and the textual apparatus of Aland, *et. al., Greek New Testament,* p. 869.

43. Eberhard Nestle, *Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament,* trans. William Edie (London: William and Norgate, 1901), p. 334. Cf. Swete, *Revelation,* p. 175.

the Beast's number in the unadulterated text does refer to Nero Caesar (as seems evident from the evidence cited above); and if this fact would be recognizable with a degree of effort by the original recipients of the letter (as should be most likely if Revelation was written to be understood by, rather than to taunt, the persecuted recipients); then it should be no mere coincidence that 616 is the numerical value of "Nero Caesar" when spelled in Hebrew by transliterating it from its Latin spelling. This would seem satisfactorily to explain the rationale for the divergence: so that the non-Hebrew mind might more readily discern the identity of the Beast. Even Guthrie, who rejects the Nero theory, grants that this variant gives the designation Nero "a distinct advantage."[44] As Metzger writes: "Perhaps the change was intentional, seeing that the Greek form Neron Caesar written in Hebrew characters נרון קסר is equivalent to 666, whereas the Latin form Nero Caesar נרו קסר is equivalent to 616."45 Thus, rather than either being inconsequential to or overthrowing the Nero theory of 666, the textual variant provides a remarkable confirmation of the theory.

Objections to the Nero Theory

Despite the above evidences, the arguments have not convinced all New Testament scholars.[46] A variety of objections is put forward by dissenters from the Nero theory. Before moving on to other brief allusions to Nero as the Beast in Revelation, some of the leading objections will be given due consideration. These will be stated first, then returned to subsequently for a seriatim analysis.

(1) The earliest fathers were unaware of this designation, as indicated particularly in that Irenaeus knew nothing of the Nero theory, even with the 616 vanant. As Morris puts it: Irenaeus does not "even include Nero in his list, let alone regard this as a likely conjecture. "4[7] In addition, Morris notes: "It is also to be borne in mind that in the ancient world when Nero was a considerable fig-

44. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 959.

45. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, p. *752*.

46. Indeed, some, such as Mounce (Revelation, p. 264), are convinced on the basis of the long standing debate that we *cannot* know the answer.

47. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 38.

ure . . . this solution was apparently never thought of."[48]

(2) The designation of 666 as a particular, historical individual misses John's point, according to some. "Merely to count up the numerical value of the figures obtained from Nero Caesar would not have answered the Apostle's purpose, and could never have filled his mind with the awe that is upon him in this verse."[49] Morris concurs with his generic, rather than specific, designate. He writes, "It is possible that such solutions are on the wrong lines and that we should understand the expression purely in terms of the symbolism of numbers."[50] He sees the number 666 as falling short of the number of Jesus' name (which carries the value of 888) and of the number of perfection (777). Thus, the number represents that "civilization without Christ is necessarily under the dominion of the evil one."[51] Hendriksen and Torrance agree with Morris's main point.[52] In essence, these scholars view the number as more symbolic that cryptogrammic.

(3) In that John writes to a Gentile church using the Greek language, we should not expect that a Hebrew form of the name was intended. According to Ladd: "No one has explained why John, writing to a Greek-reading public, would have used the elaborate symbolism of gematria with a Hebrew instead of a Greek form of the name."[53] Richardson, Morris, Guthrie, Mounce and others concur with Ladd.[54]

These, then, are the leading objections to the Nero theory regarding the meaning of 666. Nevertheless, despite their being advanced by numerous fine scholars, these difficulties are not insuperable. A brief rebuttal to them will suffice to enhance the positive evidence in the theory's favor outlined above.

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48. *Ibid.*, p. 174. Cp. Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 265; Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 959.

49. Milligan, *Discussions,* p. 120.

50. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 174.

51. *Ibid.*

52. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 182. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 86.

53. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 186.

54. Donald W. Richardson, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Richmond: John Knox, [1939] 1964), pp. 84-86; Morris, *Revelation,* p. 174; Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 959; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 265.

The Early Fathers

The first objection proffered above is one of the two strongest (the third being the other weighty one). It would seem most reasonable to expect that since Irenaeus wrote within about one hundred years of Revelation, he likely would have heard of the proper view. At the very least, we would think, Irenaeus would recognize the true view, though growing indistinct, as a theory to be given equal footing with the solutions he does proffer. But, as a matter of fact, in his lengthy treatment of the gematria in *Against Heresies* 5:28-30 (especially chapter 30), he provides at least three possible interpretations – and Nero's name is conspicuously absent. Furthermore, *no* early Church father suggests Nero's name as the proper designation of 666, even though various suggestions were given by such men as Irenaeus, Andreas of Caesarea, Victorious, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, and others. Surely this is a potent objection for the twentieth century interpreter.55 Even this objection, however, strong as it is, is not fatal to the theory, and that on the following grounds:

First, the very fact that Irenaeus, writing just one hundred years after Revelation, cannot be sure of the proper designation demonstrates that the true interpretation, whatever it was, very quickly had been lost. If this is true of Irenaeus in A.D. 180, it is certainly true of the later fathers. Mounce suggests that "John intended only his intimate associates to be able to decipher the number. So successful were his precautions that even Irenaeus some one hundred years later was unable to identify the person intended."[56] Had Irenaeus offered with conviction and assurance a specific alternative, the case against the Nero theory would have been more seriously challenged. Interestingly, Irenaeus suggests the hopelessness of determining the proper understanding: "It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same questions will, after all, remain unsolved. "5[7]

55. Although it should not go unnoticed that the views of Irenaeus and others are not adopted by modern commentators anyway.

56. Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 265. Interestingly, this is somewhat inimical to Mounce's premillennialism, Are we to believe that John told the first century church the name of a twentieth or twenty-first century man?

57. *Against Heresies* 5:30:3.

Still further in this same section he writes: "We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision."

Irenaeus admits hi-s own ignorance on the matter. How can that prove the Nero theory wrong? It simply proves what is obvious: Very early in Revelation's history, the key was lost. It does not follow that it could not have indicated Nero Caesar, or that it could never be found again.

Second, while indicating his ignorance of any assured tradition on the matter, Irenaeus puts forward three possible solutions, out of the many[58] that floated around in his era: "*Euanthas*" (which he does not develop and which is not understandable today), "*Lateinos*" (which he thinks possible, and that indicates the Roman empire), and "*Teitan*" (which he thinks "has a strong degree of probability and is an ancient name"). These are probably "Irenaeus's guesses (for they are obviously no more). "5[9]

Nevertheless, it is at least interesting that two of these (we know not what *Euanthas* means) are quite compatible with the Nero designation. The name "*Lateinos*," which signifies the Roman Empire, could well involve the Empire's head at the particular time. And if Nero were emperor when John wrote Revelation, then it would signify Nero. The interchangeability of the idea of the "Beast" and one of its "heads" in Revelation 13 is a well-known phenomenon.[60] Sometimes the Beast is generic (representing the evil kingdom and having seven heads); sometimes it is specific (representing an evil person as one of the heads). This phenomenon may historically explain the early "*Lateinos*" theory, which was also held by Hippolytus in his *Treatise on Christ ano! Antichrist.*[61] "Nero" would be the specific and "*Lateinos*" the generic form.

The name "*Teitan*," *as* Irenaeus recognizes (even with a deviant spelling), is also a name for the sun god: "Among many persons, too, this name is accounted divine, so that even the sun is termed

58. "It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this" (5:30:3).

59. Swete, *Revelation,* p. 175.

60. Charles, *Revelation* 1:365. *See* Chap. 18 below.

61. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist 49.*

'Titan' by those who do now possess [the rule] ."[62] The Roman writers Cicero and Ovid have been produced as evidence of the sun's being called "Titan"[63] among the Remans. Remarkably Nero was widely known to have adopted the attributes of the sun deity as his own.

> Titan was one of the old poetic names of the Sun, and the Sun was the deity whose attributes Nero most affected, as all the world was able to judge from seeing his colossus with radiated head, of which the substructure of the base still remains close by the ruins of the Colosseum. The mob which greeted him with shouts of 'Nero-Apollo!' were well aware that he had a predilection for this title.[64]

It seems that Irenaeus at least may have been on the right path.

Third, there is the possibility that Irenaeus did not record the Nero theory because of his predisposition to a futuristic interpretation of Revelation generated by his premillennialism. With such a predilection for futurism, he may not have deemed the Nero view worthy of mentioning. He does seem a little perturbed that some have the variant number in their texts and use it to offer various suggested names: "But as for those who, for the sake of vainglory, lay it down for certain that names containing the spurious number are to be accepted, and affirm that this name, hit upon by themselves, is that of him who is to come; such persons shall not come forth without loss, because they have led into error both themselves and those who confided in them. "[65] Could he have been just as disturbed by those who suggested that the correct number indicated a name of the past, and not of the future? He does give much attention to the future coming and kingdom of Christ, and makes great use of Revelation in that discussion.[66] He insists that "in a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicted to the Lord's disciples what *shall happen in the last times.* "[67] He says that John only "indicates the number of the name now, that *when this man comes we* may avoid him, being

62. *Against Heresies* 5:30:5. Victorious also records this view, *Apocalypse* 13.

63. Note by W. H. Rambaut, translator, in *ANF* 1:559.

64. Farrar, *Early Days,* p. 470. See also Seneca's reference to Nero in terms of Apollo in Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches,* 3rd cd., trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), p. 52.

65. *Against Heresies 5:30:1.*

66. *Ibid.* 5:25-35.

67. *Ibid. 5:26:1*

aware who he is."[68] Although he admits there were many names being suggested (5:30:3), he only cites three. Obviously he left out the ones he personally felt least credible – perhaps even on (misguided) theological grounds.

Missing the Point

The second objection – that seeking a definite, historical individual misses John's point – is widely held. Yet this objection itself seems to miss a vital point, and runs into more difficulties than it solves.

In the first place – and this is the really critical deficiency of the objection — this view denies what John expressly affirms. It is quite clear that John carefully cues the reader to the fact that the number is the number "of a man." Had John *not* given the cue as he did, the wholly symbolic approach would be on an equal footing with the cryptogrammic approach.

Second, turning back to ecclesiastical tradition, as the late date advocates are wont to do, we must ask about Irenaeus's (and others) attempts to specify a name for the Beast. There was a diligent effort to do so. It seemed obvious to the early Church that a specific name was involved. And what of the reference in Revelation 13:17 to "the number of the name (τοῦ ὀνόματος)"? A specific name (hence, the definite article τοῦ) is clearly expected in the text.

Furthermore, why do the symbolic requirements demand three sixes, as in 666? With the common number seven so current in Revelation, why was not the number of the Beast, if wholly symbolic, simply a lone 6? Or why not 66? Or 6666? And if wholly symbolic, how could the number have been corrupted to 616 before Irenaeus's time? Such a corruption would destroy the symbolic function, and that extremely early in its history.

Third, how is it that settling upon Nero's name as a specific individual destroys the symbolism? Could not the name be both a cryptogram and a symbol, by God's providence? In Sibylline Oracles 1:328-329 Jesus' name is signified by 888. This definitely specifies an individual, while at the same time serving a symbolic function. It is quite ironic that while seeking to establish the pure-symbolic designation of 666, Morris points out that: "If we take the sum of the values

68. *Ibid.* 5:30:3.

represented by the letters of the name *Iesous*, the Greek name 'Jesus', it comes to 888. Each digit is one more than seven, the perfect number. But 666 yields the opposite phenomenon, for each digit falls short. The number may be meant to indicate not an individual, but a persistent falling short."[69] He knows that Jesus is an historic individual and that His name is symbolic, too. Does not Nero become typical of the antichrist in Christian history, largely due to his being the first of the secular persecutors of Christianity? Though he is a specific individual, he also becomes a symbol of Rome's persecuting wrath, as in the Ascension of Isaiah 4:1 ff. and the Sibylline Oracles 8:65ff. Bo Reicke even suggests that 666 became a political slogan used for the cruel and tyrannical persecution introduced by Nero.'"

The Hebrew Spelling Problem

The third objection to the Nero referent is that Nero's name is precluded on the grounds that (a) John writes to Gentile churches, which suggests the need for using Greek letters, and (b) the process of the deriving of the name "Nero" from "666" requires too many elaborate intricacies. This is the second most substantial argument against the Nero theory. Careful reflection upon this objection, however, dispels its force, especially when we consider it in the light of the positive evidence set forth heretofore in its favor.

First, although John wrote in Greek, Revelation has long been recognized as one of the more "Jewish" books of the New Testament. "More than any other book in the New Testament, the Apocalypse of John shows a Jewish cast."[71] Indeed, one of the arguments that historically has been granted the most weight for its early date (as per Westcott and Hort) is that its language is so intensely Hebraic in comparison to the Gospel's smoother Greek. Harendberg, Bolton, Torrey, and others suggest an Aramaic original for Revelation because of this .[72] In Charles's introduction to Revelation, he included

69. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 174.

70. *See* reference in Sweet, *Revelation*, p. *218n.*

71. Gustav Kruger, *History of Early Christian Literature in the First Three Centuries*, trans. C. R. Gillett (London: Macmillan, 1897), p. 35.

72. See diseussion in Bernhard Weiss, *A Manual of Introductuon to t/w New Testament*, *vol. 2*, trans. A. J. K. Davidson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1889) p. 75; Torrey, *Apocalypse*, pp. x, 27-58; Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th ed., trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville Abingdon, 1973), p. 465; J. Schmid, in *Theologische Revue 62 (1966): 306.*

a major section entitled "A Short Grammar of the Apocalypse." Section 10 of this "Grammar" is entitled "The Hebraic Style of the Apocalypse."[73] There Charles well notes that *"while [John] writes in Greek, he thinks in Hebrew."*[74] As Sweet puts it: "The probability is that the writer, thinking in Hebrew or Aramaic, consciously or unconsciously carried over semitic idioms into his Greek, and that his 'howlers' are deliberate attempts to reproduce the grammar of classical Hebrew at certain points. "7[5] Indeed, its very frequent Jewish sound is a major factor – although unnecessarily so – in the form critical analyses of the book (as per Moffatt and Charles).

What is more, other names in Revelation are, as a matter of fact, very Hebraic. For instance, the words "Abaddon" (Rev. 9:11) and "Armageddon" (Rev. 16: 16) are carefully given Greek equivalents; "Satan" is said to be "the devil" (Rev. 12:9).76 How natural, it would seem, to adopt a Hebraic spelling for the basis of the cryptogram.

Furthermore, there are a number of examples in the New Testament of the Greek spelling of Hebrew names. For example, an illustration from Mark might prove helpful. Mark is generally considered to be a Gentile gospel, by conservatives and liberals. Some even suggest Mark's readers dwelt in Rome. 77 Nevertheless, in Mark 3:18 Simon "the Kananaios" (or Zealot) has a name that would be difficult to interpret by Gentiles. The difficulty is interesting: "Now, as we have seen, the word *kananaios* is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic *qan'ana'*, meaning 'Zealot'."[78] This shifting back and forth

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73. Charles, *Revelation*, 1: cxvii, cxlii. BeckWith agreed that John was "a writer, whose mode of thought and native speech are Hebraic" (Isbon T. BeckWith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1917) 1967], p. 355).

74. Charles, *Revelation*, p. cxliii.

75. Sweet, *Revelation,* p. 16.

76. Other Hebrew words appear, as well: "amen" is said to mean "truthfully" (Rev. 3:14) and the Hebrew "hallelujah" is not even translated into a Greek equivalent (Rev. 19:1,3,4, 6).

77. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 59. See also S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of A.D. 70 on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1957), chap. 10; S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity (New* York Scribners, 1967), pp. 242ff.; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark.* Macmillan New Testament Commentaries (London Macmillan, 1953), pp. 32ff., 335; Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 81ff.; H. G. Wood, *Jesus in the Twentieth Century* (London: 1960), pp. 25ff. Kümmel disagrees with the Roman destination, but accepts the fact of its Gentile audience (Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 98).

78. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, p. 244. In support of his view he cites E. Kloster-

between languages is exactly parallel to the gematria problem in Revelation 13.

Third, as a matter of fact, Asia Minor was well populated by Jews. "Long before the Christian era the Jews had formed a considerable factor in the population of the Asian cities. "[79] A number of scholars, including Ramsay and Walker, agree.[80]

More broadly, we should note that the Jewish presence was felt throughout the Roman Empire. "The Jews, since the Babylonish captivity, had been scattered over all the world. They were as ubiquitous in the Roman empire in the first century as they are now throughout Christendom. According to Josephus and Strabo, there was no country where they did not make up a part of the population."[81] In fact, "in the times of Augustus, the Greek historian and geographer Strabo (quoted in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.115) could write that in the entire inhabited world there was hardly a place where the power of the Jews had not made itself felt. "[82] Because of the first century Diaspora a "great Jewish world . . . had grown up around Palestine, a world that reached out into all the known lands. "[83]

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mann *(Das Markusevangelium*, 2nd ed. [1926], p. 35); E. Schürer (*Geshichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, 4th ed. [Leipzig 1901] 1:486; G. Dalman (*Jesu-Jeshua*, trans. P. P. Levertoff [London: 1922], p. 12); Eisler (*IESO US BASILEUS*, 2:68); Joseph Klausner (*Jesus of Nazareth* [London: Allen and Unwin: 1925], p. 254); Vincent Taylor (*Mark*, p. 234) and M. Hengel (*Die Zeloton*, pp. 72-73).

79. Swete, Revelation, p. lxvi. Here he makes reference to Philo, *Legatio ad Cajum* 33 and Contra *Flaccum 7.*

80. William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1904] 1963), chap. 12. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 16, writes of the Jews in the first century: "They were a notable part of the population of Alexandria. They were strongly rooted in Syria and Asia Minor. . . . Few cities of the empire were without their presence."

81. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, 8* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:85. Josephus's statements are found in Josephus's *Wars* 3:3 and *Antiquities* 14:7:2.

82. H. H. Ben-Sasson, cd., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1976), p. 277. In this work much attention is given on the influence of the Jews on the Roman Empire: "In the Second Temple era, the Jewish faith expanded as it never had before and never has since. Throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond it, people adopted the Jewish faith or at least part of the Jewish way of life" (p. 288). See Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:282ff. Note the complaint of the Roman writers about the Jewish influences Tacitus, *Histories* 5:5; Juvenal, *Fourteenth Satire* 11:96ff.

83. Rufus Learsi, *Israel: A History of the Jewish People (New* York: World, 1949), p. 166. See also: *Sibylline* Oracles 3:271ff.

The audience then could well be composed of at least a significant minority of Jews. And why not? Was not John himself a Jew? Was not he, the writer of Revelation, sent "to the circumcised" (Gal. 2:9)? Despite the brevity of each of the Seven Letters, in them are prominent allusions to Jewish situations (Rev. 2:9, 14; 3:9).[84] In the book itself are very definite allusions to Jewish matters, such as the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7 and 14).

Incidental Allusions to Nero

In the very chapter in which the gematria is embedded – Revelation 13 – there are subtle indicators of personal features that suggestively enhance the designation of Nero as the figure behind the gematria. The correspondences, though admittedly subtle, are suggestive enough to discourage any hasty dismissal of them as merely coincidental. These insights, though subsidiary to the main argument, lend additional weight to the major supportive evidence. These subtle indicators are brought into our argument late in order simply to fill out the picture presented; they are not individually substantial.

The Character of the Beast

First, as indicated much earlier in our research, the character of the beast befits Nero's character.[85] Here in Revelation 13 the one behind the gematria is called a "beast." The word for "beast" in Greek (*θηρίον*) is a term frequently used of "wild animals," of "dangerous animals."[86] *Θηρίον* is often used of the wild, carnivorous animals employed in the cruel Roman arenas.[87] Although the idea of wildness in the meaning may be emphasized by modification with the adjective *κακός* (as in Tit. 1:12), Foerster observes that "the original sense of *θηρίον* maintains such vitality that even in the

84. See Chap. 13.

85. Of course, it is true that there is a discernible shifting between a specific (an individual) and a generic (a kingdom) referent. Thus, there will be some overlapping.

86. W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 361. In Lev. 26:6 the beasts of the land are symbolic of evil; in Lev. 26:22 God promises their return to plague Israel and to bereave her of her children if she is unfaithful to the covenant. Messianic blessedness vanquishes the evil beasts (Isa. 11:6-9; Eze. 34:25).

87. Josephus, Wars 7:38; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2:4; *3E.;* 11:1 K.; Ignatius, *Romans* 4 1ff., 5:3, *Smyrnaens* 4:2, *Diognetus* 7:7; Hermas, *Visions* 3:2:1.

Hellenistic] period no addition is needed to convey the sense of a wild animal to readers."[88] The context of its occurrence in Revelation 13 certainly speaks of a most ferocious creature: "And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads. . . . And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion" (Rev. 13: lb-2a). Because of its natural association, the term is often quite aptly used figuratively of persons with "a 'bestial' nature, *beast, monster.*"[89]

Now it is almost universally agreed that Nero was one who was possessed of a "bestial nature."[90] Nero often acted in "horrible viciousness as regards men and women."[91] According to Suetonius, Nero "compelled four hundred senators and six hundred Roman knights, some of whom were well to do and of unblemished reputation, to fight in the arena."[92] He was a sodomist (*Nero* 28) who is said to have castrated a boy named Sporus and married him (*Nero* 28, 29). He enjoyed homosexual rape (*Nero* 28) and torture (*Nero* 29). He killed his parents, brother, wife, aunt, and many others close to him (Nero 33-35). He even "so prostituted his own chastity that after defiling almost every part of his body, he at last devised a kind of game, in which, covered with the skin of some wild animal, he was let loose from a cage and attacked the private parts of men and women, who were bound to stakes" (Nero 29).

More particularly for Revelation's purpose, Nero was the first of the imperial authorities to persecute Christianity, and that with the vilest evil and most horrendous fury. Tacitus records the scene in Rome when the persecution of Christians broke out:

> So, to dispel the report, [Nero] substituted as the guilty persons and inflicted unheard-of punishments on those who, detested for their abominable crimes, were vulgarly called Christians. . . . And their death was aggravated with mockeries, insomuch that, wrapped in the

88. Werner Foerster, "*θηρίον*," *TDNT 3:134.*

89. Arndt and Gingrich, Lexicon, p. 361. See their references: Aristophanes, *Equites 273, Plutus 439, Nubes 184;* Appian; Alciphron 2:17; Achilles Tatius 6:12:3; Josephus, *Wars* 1:624, 627; *Antiquities 17:* 117; 120; Vettius Valens 78:9; Philo, *Concerning Abraham* 33.

90. An almost solitary defender of Nero suggests he was a victim of bad publicity. See Weigall, Nero.

91. Henderson, Nero, p. 415.

92. Nero 12.

> hides of wild beasts, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or fastened to crosses to be set on fire, that when the darkness fell they might be burned to illuminate the night. . . . Whence it came about that, though the victims were guilty and deserved the most exemplary punishment, a sense of pity was aroused by the feeling that they were sacrificed not on the altar of public interest, but to satisfy the cruelty of one man.[93]

Apollonius of Tyana (b. 4 B. C.) specifically called Nero a "beast": "In my travels, which have been wider than ever man yet accomplished, I have seen many, many wild beasts of Arabia and India; but this beast, that is commonly called a Tyrant, I know not how many heads it has, nor if it be crooked of claw, and armed with horrible fangs. . . . And of wild beasts you cannot say that they were ever known to eat their own mother, but Nero has gorged himself on this diet."[94] It is important to understand that "the context shows that he is thinking of a beast of prey with claws and teeth, a carnivorous animal, like a lion or panther."[95] In Sibylline oracles 8:157 (dated about A.D.175)[96] Nero is fearfully designated a "great beast" (*θὴρ μέγας*). In this section of the Oracles we read "then dark blood will pursue the great beast."[97]

Lactantius, speaks of him as "an execrable and pernicious tyrant" and a "noxious wild beast. "[98] Eusebius writes of him as one possessed of "extraordinary madness, under the influence of which, [he] . . . accomplished the destruction of so many myriads without any reason."[99] Henderson records the assessments of several scholars regarding Nero's, character: Diderot and Marivale call him "the Monster." [100] Renan speaks of him as "the first in that long line of monsters." Duruy claims he "has no equal in history, to whom no analogy may be found save in the pathological annals of the scaffold. " De Quincey calls him "Nero the Arch Tyrant." Menvale and Beule state that he "was the last and most detestable of the Caesarean

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93. *Annals* 15:44.
94. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 438.
95. Foerster, "*θηρίον*," *TDNT 3:134.*
96. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:416.
97. This reference is clearly speaking of Nero as has been noted by Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:421, and Foerster, "*θηρίον*," *TDNT 3:134.*
98. Lactantius, *Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died 3 (see ANF* 7:302).
99. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25:2.
100. Henderson, Nero, p. 13.

family." Clearly Nero fits the bill of the beast. He was a destructive "beast" of the worst and most horrible sort – far worse than the paranoid Domitian.

At this juncture we must consider the fact that, according to Revelation 13:10, the "beast" is alive while Revelation is being written. This precludes any figure beyond the date of the writing of Revelation, which at the latest is 95-96. Nero's name is most appropriate in this connection.

The Serpent

Second, there seems to be a subtle indication that the one designated "666" is somehow serpent-like. Not only is Satan himself called a "serpent" in Revelation (Rev. 20:2), but his cohort, the Beast, is so designated. The sound of the number 666 even in English sounds hauntingly like a serpent's chilling hiss. In the Greek the situation is the same. The three letters serving as the number are: χξς. Phonetically their eerie sound is that of a serpent's hiss. What is more, the middle number-letter even has the appearance of writhing serpent: ξ.[101]

What is interesting in this regard is the apparently well-known relationship of Nero with a serpent. According to Suetonius, at about the age of three while Nero was napping,

> would-be assassins were frightened away be a snake which darted out from under his pillow. The only foundation for this tale was, that there was found in his bed near the pillow the slough of a serpent; but nevertheless at his mother's desire he had the skin enclosed in a golden bracelet, and wore it for a long time on his left arm. But when at last the memory of his mother grew hateful to him, he threw it away, and afterwards in the time of his extremity sought it again in vain.[102]

Tacitus mentions the discovery of a serpent in Nero's crib.[103] In Die's work we read: "As time went on, the finding of a serpent's skin around Nero's neck while he was still a child caused the seers to declare that he should receive great power from an old man; for serpents are supposed to slough off their old age by discarding their

101. Farrar, *Early Days*, p. 470.
102. Nero 6:4.
103. *Annals* 11:11.

old skin."[104] Weigall expands on this episode and notes Agrippina's (Nero's mother) superstition in this regard:

> One day when Nero was asleep, in his cot, an attempt to strangle him was made by some men, apparently in the pay of the Empress, who had concealed themselves near by; but the approach of his mother frightened them, and they decamped. It was then discovered that an old snake-skin had been placed under the boy's pillow, probably by his nurse, as a magical protection against harm; and Agrippina was superstitious enough to attribute his escape to the power of this charm.
>
> But a snake-skin had also another occult quality, according to the folk-lore of the time – namely, that of bestowing upon its possessor great honour through the medium of an elderly man, this fancy having its origin in the belief that an old snake renewed its strength and youth by shedding its skin.
>
> Agrippina therefore took comfort in the thought that her boy was evidently going to be honoured in the future by the already middle-aged Claudius; and she caused the snake-skin to be made into a bracelet which she obliged Nero always to wear. 105

Obviously the use of such a snake-charm by Nero was well-known; it appears in ancient history books dating more than a half-century later. This Nero-serpent connection also occurs in the Sibylline Oracles Book 5 (dated before A.D. 132)[106]:

> One who has fifty as an initial will be commander, a terrible snake, breathing out grievous war, who one day will lay hands on his own family and slay them.[107]

Collins's note on this Sibylline verse is of interest: "The fact that [Nero] is called a snake maybe influenced by the story that a serpent was found around his neck when he was an infant (Tacitus, *Annals* 11:11)."[108]

Admittedly, the connection is not the strongest; it could never serve alone as proof Nevertheless, here, at least, is a quite suggestive correspondence in a most unusual detail of Nero's life.

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104. *Roman History 61:2:4.*
105. Weigall, Nero, pp. 43-44.
106. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP* 1:390.
107. *Sibylline Oracles* 5:28-30; *OTP 1:393.*
108. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," *OTP 1:393,*

The Beast's Red Color

The red color of the beast (Rev. 17:3) may also point to Nero. Certainly the colors of the harlot's garments (Rev. 17:4) seem to be colors appropriate for either of the two leading interpretations as to her identity. If she represents imperial Rome the scarlet and purple well suggest the colors of the robes of the emperor. If she is representative of Jerusalem, the colors reflect the colors of the high priest's garments and of the temple's curtains. It would seem most appropriate to expect the red color of the beast to also correspond to the person designated as the beast whose number is 666.

It is true, of course, that the red color may be indicative of the bloodshed caused by the beast. This possibility readily suggests itself to even the casual reader (cp. Rev. 6:4). Nevertheless, Weigall pointed to another potential rationale for the red color: Nero's red beard.[109] Suetonius writes of the legend associated with Nero's ancestral parentage, which "explains" why he had a red beard:

> Of the Domitian family two branches have acquired distinction, the Calvini and the Ahenobarbi.[110] The latter have as the founder of their race and the origin of their surname Lucius Domitius, to whom, as he was returning from the country, there once appeared twin youths of more than mortal majesty, so it is said, and bade him carry to the senate and people the news of a victory, which was as yet unknown. And as a token of their divinity it is said that they stroked his cheeks and turned his black beard to a ruddy hue, like that of bronze. This sign was perpetuated in his descendants, a great part of whom had red beards.[111]

Obviously Nero's red beard (which he wore for a time) was noteworthy, for here is a legend created in explanation of it. The red color of the beast of Revelation serves nicely as an identifier.

The Beast's Death

The manner of Nero's death corresponds with the prophecy of Revelation 13:10, 14:

> If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if any one kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the persever-

109. Weigall, Nero, p. 299.
110. "Ahenobarbus" means "red beard." See Weigall, Nero, p. 25.
111. Suetonius, Nero 1:1,

anceand the faith of the saints (Rev. 13:10).

> And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life (Rev. 13:14).

In the context of speaking of the beast, John gives encouragement to those whom the beast was presently afflicting:"2 "Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints," i.e., that the beast who slays by the sword would also be slain by the sword.

That Nero did in fact kill by the sword (and by many other means) is well-attested fact. Paul, for example, is said to have died under Nero by decapitation by means of the sword.113 Tertullian credits "Nero's cruel sword" as providing the martyr's blood as seed for the church. [114] Just as well-attested is the fact of Nero's own death by sword. According to Suetonius, he "drove a dagger into his throat, aided by Epaphroditus, his private secretary."'15 He not only killed others by the sword, but himself, as Revelation mentions.

Again, this evidence alone cannot compel the conclusion that Nero is in mind; many emperors died by the sword, even Domitian. But it quite harmoniously lends its voice to the chorus of other evidences, both major and minor.

Conclusion

The role of Nero Caesar in Revelation is written large. As all roads lead to Rome, so do they all terminate at Nero Caesar's palace. The factors pointing to Nero in Revelation are numerous and varied, including even intricate and subtle minutiae. It is difficult to discount the many ways in which Nero fits the expectations of Revelation. He is the only contemporary historical figure that can possibly fulfill all of the requirements. Contrary to Swete, Mounce, and others who fear that the key to Revelation's "666" is lost, we suggest that the key is actually in the keyhole.

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112. John himself currently was exiled to Patmos while under "the tribulation" (Rw. 1:9). The beast was destined to die in the future (Rev. 13:10): "he must be killed by the sword." This was to be soon after the Revelation was written (Rw. 1:1, 3, 19; 22:6ff.).

113. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25:5; Tertullian, *The Exclusion of Heretics* 36.

114. Tertullian, *Apology* 21.

115. Nero 49:2.

Surely Nero's specter haunts the pages of Revelation. That being the case, we have a sure terminus for the book's time of writing: June, A.D. 68, the date of Nero's death. This comports well with all the other avenues explored thus far.

13

THE ROLE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

Invaluable to the determination of the dating of any book is its *Sitz im Leben*, the "situation in life" in which it is found. The question here is whether the "situation" we see in the book of Revelation is more likely a pre-A.D. 70 situation or a ca. A.D. 95 situation.

Of course, there is always the possibility of a distortion of the evidence in this area, due either to the interpreter's subjectivity or to an obscurity in the necessary factors of the situation. These problems are further complicated in Revelation studies because of the close tolerance of the time differences involved in the debate. While the critical problems with Old Testament datings often involve determinations affecting centuries, the Revelation dating problem involves but three decades. Nevertheless, the *Sitz im Leben*, where reasonably discernible, does have an important bearing upon the determination of the dating of the composition of any ancient work, and Revelation is no exception.

Early Christianity's Development

We observed previously that the composition and the conduct of the Christian community in Revelation bespeaks an early era in Christianity's development. "From the very beginning of the story in Acts this Christian group is marked as *Jewish* in its origins and background."[1] Christianity gradually developed through several stages of self-awareness and missionary outreach in the first century of its existence.[2] Its first stage in Christ's ministry was almost wholly

1. Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (London: Chapman, 1971), p. 274.

2. C. F. D. Moule's chapter entitled "The Church Explains Itself: Stages of Self-Awareness" is helpful reading in this regard. See Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament,*

focused on racial Israel and religious Judaism. The Lord Himself ministered first to "the lost sheep of Israel."[3] Later, in the second stage toward the end of Christ's ministry, the Great Commission (Matt. 20:28ff.; Acts 1:8) commanded a worldwide outreach to all nations. But that this was only dimly understood by the early original (Jewish) Christians is evident in light of the difficulties witnessed in Acts 10, 11, 15, and Galatians 2.

Even in this early post-commission Christianity, believers continued to gravitate toward the Jews: engaging in Jewish worship observances (Acts 2: 1ff.; 21:26; 24:11), focusing on and radiating their ministry from Jerusalem (Acts 2 — 5) while frequenting the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3: 1ff.; 4: 1; 5:21ff.; 21:26; 26:21), attending the synagogues (13:5, 14; 14:1; 15:21; 17:1ff.; 18:4, 7, 19, 26; 19:8; 22:19; 24:12; 26: 11), designating themselves as the true heirs of Judaism (Gal. 3:27-29; 6:16; Phil. 3:3), and so forth.

> The first Christians did not think of the Church primarily as an organized society; to them it was the faithful Remnant consisting of heirs to the divine promises; it was the New Israel and its members were therefore the elect or chosen of God; it was the Temple of the divine presence indwelt by the Spirit.[4]

Leonhard Goppelt discusses the matter at hand by commenting that Jesus'

> disciples, however, were faithful at first in their observance of both, as Acts unobtrusively recounts . . . , so that their special teaching and customs offered no occasion for them not to be considered Jews. Indeed, they had not separated themselves publicly nearly as much as had the Essenes. Only after A.D. 70 did the requirements for membership in Judaism become more stringent.[5]

3rd ed. (New York Harper & Row, 1982), chap. 3. Cf. also Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, 8* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950), vol. 1, chap. 11: "Theology of the Apostolic Church"; and Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York: Cassell, 1884), chap. 19: "Judaic Christianity." A quite liberal analysis of this fact, requiring cautious employment, can be found in Charles Guignebert, *The Early History of Christianity (New* York: Twayne, [n.d.] rep.), pp. 109ff. See also Gregory Dix, *Jew and Greek: A Study in the Primitive Church* (Westminster Dacre Press, n.d.), chap. 2.

3. See Matthew 10:6ff.; 15:21ff.; John 1:11; cp. Romans 1:16.

4. J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), p. 46.

5. Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, trans. Robert A. Guelich

The Jewish Character of Christianity in Revelation

In Revelation there is quite suggestive evidence that the era in which John wrote was one in which Christianity was still largely affected by and strongly attached to the Jewish community.

The Evidence

In Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 two churches are warned that some claim to be Jews, but are not:

> I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Rev. 2:9).
>
> Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie – behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you (Rev. 3:9).

John here indicates that at least two of the seven churches (Smyrna and Philadelphia) are plagued by "those who say they are Jews." That those who plagued them were racial Jews and undoubtedly of the Jewish faith can be fairly assumed in that the Jews had distinctive racial features and wore a distinctive cultic mark (circumcision).[6] The question naturally arises: Who would array themselves against the Church, posing as racial Jews, who were not racial Jews?[7] Apparently these churches were being persecuted by Jews in these two

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(London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), p. 26. He documents the Jewish terminology which Christians used of themselves (pp. 26ff.) and develops the Church's "self-understanding" in chaps. 2 and 3.

6. Justin Martyr wrote "For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; . . . For you are not recognised among the rest of men by any other mark than your fleshly circumcision" (*Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 16). Tacitus wrote of the Jews: "They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference" (*Histories* 5:5). See also Martial 7:82 and Tertullian, *Ars Answer to the Jews* 3. In the post-Maccabean era circumcision attained immense importance among the Jews, *1 Maccabees 1:15, 48,* 60; *Assumption of Moses 8:1;* Josephus, *Antiquities 12:241.* They also wore distinctive clothing (Num. 15), which had developed by this time into the prayer-shawl with its tassels.

7. Interestingly for our thesis, in the two verses under consideration John uses the Hebrew word for the devil (σατανᾶς), rather than the Greek (διάβολος). Commentators deeming this fact noteworthy include Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New*

cities, as Crtristianity was very often persecuted in the first century by the Jews (cf. Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5; etc.). Frend observes that "down to A.D. 64 danger threatened the Christian Church from the Jews and the Jews alone."8

Jewish antipathy to Christianity at Smyma is very evident, for the "Jews at Smyrna were both numerous and aggressively hostile."[9] Thus, John derides these Jews as not really being Jews in the true, spiritual sense of the word. As Mounce puts it: "Members of the local synagogue may claim to be Jews, but the very claim constitutes them liars."[10] Thus John does here what Paul does in Remans 2:17-29: he distinguishes between the "true Jew" (the Christian who is a "Jew" inwardly and spiritually) and the "false Jew" (one who is a Jew racially and religiously). These Jews had forsaken the truth of historic, God-given Judaism by not following after the Messiah and subscribing to the Christian faith.

Thus, John attributes a spiritual significance of the highest order to being a "Jew," i.e., in the true sense of the word: a Christian. The Christians *at this stage* were argumentatively presenting themselves as the true Jews.[11] This must be at an early stage of Christian development when Christianity still understood and presented itself as true Judaism.

This conception of Christianity is strongly reaffirmed again later in Revelation. Christians are still designated as the true Jews, the fullness of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:4-8; 14: 1ff.; 21: 12). Revelation 7:4-8 is particular instructive:

> And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and

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International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 93; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 64; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John, 2* vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1:56-57; Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. *31;* and many others.

8. W. H. C. Frend, *The Early Church* (Philadelphia Fortress, 1982), p. 29.

9. Swete, *Revelation,* p. 31. He cites Lightfoot, *Ignatius,* 1:468 ff. and Schurer, *Geschichte,* 3rd cd., pp. 11, 29, 34. Original ancient documentation is garnered from Andreas, *Interpretation of Revelation, ad. 10C.;* Ignatius, *Letter to the Smrynaeans* 1:2; *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12:2; *13:1.* For additional early, non-canonical evidence of Jewish antipathy to Christianity elsewhere, see also Justin, *Dialogues* 16:11; 47: 15; 965; Tertullian, Scorpion's *Sting* 10.

10. Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 119.

11. C$_p$. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; Gal. 6 16; James 1:1; 1 Pet. 2:9.

> forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphthali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

Inarguably, an elevated symbolism is here presented. If nothing else, the perfect rounding of numbers along with the exact and identical count in each of the tribes bespeak a symbolic representation. The number "1000" is frequently used in Scripture as an indefinite, yet significantly large number (Psa. 90:4; Dan. 7:10; 2 Pet. 3:8; Heb. 12:22).

Yet this symbolism must be founded upon some historical designation. And, of course, the "twelve tribes of Israel" is the long-standing historical configuration of the Jewish race. [12] In light of this, it would seem that two possible interpretations easily lend themselves to consideration: either this number represents the totality of the Christian Church as the fulfillment of the Jewish hope, [13] or it represents the saved of Jewish lineage.[14] In either case the interpretation most likely supports the early date of Revelation in that Christian history was at a stage in which either the Church at large was called by Jewish names or in which the bulk of Christians were Jewish.

Other indicators include the fact that not only are the expressions of Revelation very Hebraic,[15] but some words are even translated into Hebrew (Rev. 9:11; 16: 16). The Church is pictured under a symbol strongly expressive of a Judaistic Christianity, as a woman

12. See Gen. 35:22ff.; 46:8ff.; 49; Ex. 1: 1ff.; Num. 1; 2; 13:4ff.; 26; 34; Deut. 27:11ff.; 33:6ff.; Josh. 13-22; Judg. 5; 1 Chron. 2-8; 12:24ff.; 27: 16ff.; Eze. 48.

13. E.g., Swete, *Revelation,* pp. 98-99.

14. E.g., Victorious, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, ad. loc.*

15. "*NO* book in all the New Testament is so Hebraistic as the Revelation" (Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse,* 2 vols. [Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845] 1:229). Charles even develops a grammar of the language of Revelation, based on its Hebraic character (Charles, *Revelation,* 1:cxvii ff). Torrey suggests an Aramaic original for it (Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John [New* Haven: Yale, 1958], p. x). See earlier discussion in Chap. 12.

with a crown of twelve stars on her head (Rev. 12:1 ff.). Christians are represented as worshiping in the Temple and ministering in Jerusalem (Rev. 11:1-8).

The Interpretation of the Evidence

In light of such evidence, we can safely observe that "the Apocalypse of John plainly belongs to the period in which Jews and Christians still lived together."[16] Robinson poses a question and suggests a conclusion along these lines:

> For is it credible that the references in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9 to those who "claim to be Jews but are not" could have been made in that form after 70? For the implication is that Christians are the real Jews, the fullness of the twelve tribes (7:4-8; 21: 12), and that if these Jews were genuinely the synagogue of Yahweh (as they claim) and not of Satan they would not be slandering "my beloved people." Even by the time of the Epistle of Barnabas, which, unlike the book of Revelation, clearly presupposes the destruction of the temple (16:1-4) and the irrevocable divide between "them" and "us" (cf. 13:1, ἡ διαθήκη εἰς ἡμᾶς ἢ εἰς ἐκείνους), such language is no longer possible. 17

As noted in Robinson's quote, Barnabas, soon after the fall of Jerusalem (c. 100), posited a radical "us/them" distinction between Christians and Jews. This is in keeping with later, post-Temple Christian practice. Ignatius (c. 107) writes: "It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism."[18] Justin Martyr (c. 160) does the same: "For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that *you* may be separated from other nations, and from *us*; and that *you* alone may suffer that which *you* now justly suffer; . . . For you are not recognized among the rest of men by any other mark than *your* fleshly circumcision. . . . For you have not the power to lay hands upon *us*, on account of those who now have the mastery. But as often as *you* could you did so."[19]

16. Torrey, *Apocalypse*, p. 80.

17. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 227-228. He notes that Hort in his commentary on Revelation 2:9 made this same point (F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* [London: Macmillan, 1908]).

18. *Epistle to the Magnesians* 10.

19. *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* 16. Emphasis mine.

It should be self-evident that the cataclysmic events of A.D. 70 played a dramatic role in the life of both the Church and Judaism in terms of their inter-relationships. Unfortunately, this event is too often overlooked by many.20 But was not Christianity born in Jerusalem (Acts 2) in obedience to Christ's commands (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1)? Was it not headquartered there in its earliest period (Acts 8:1; 11:2; 15:2; Gal. 1:17, 18; 2:1, 2)? Yet when the dust settles after the Fall of Jerusalem, we no longer find a Christian concentration on Jerusalem. Indeed, in A.D. 80 Gamaliel II caused the Jewish daily prayer (*Shemone Esre*) to include a curse on the Christians: "Let the Nazarene [*sc.* Christian] and the Menim perish utterly."[21] Indeed, "it is impossible for us nowadays to realize the shock of A.D. 70 to a community in which Jewish and Gentile members alike had been reared in the profoundest veneration of the immemorial sanctity of the Holy City and the Temple."[22]

Certainly the breach did not come overnight. Since its inception Christianity had been persecuted almost exclusively by the Jews throughout the period of the Acts.[23] Yet many converts were being

20. Few New Testament scholars have really come to grips with the significance of Jerusalem's fall. S. G. F. Brandon states: "Attention has already been drawn to the curious neglect scholars have shown towards the subject of the significance of the destruction of Jerusalem for the infant Christian Church" (Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of A.D. 70 on Christianity* [London: SPCK, 1957], p. x). Since the publication of Robinson's persuasive *Redating the New Testament (1976),* however, this calamity is difficult to overlook.

21. See Torrey, *Apocalypse,* p. *82;* H. Daniel-Reps, *The Church of Apostles and Martyrs,* trans. Audrey Butler (London: Dent, 1963), p. 48.

22. B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924), p. 516.

23. We maintain this in spite of the confident assertions by Brandon that "the Palestinian Christians stood well in the estimation of their fellow countrymen and were subjected to no concerted persecution by the popular leaders and the people" and "the Palestinian Christians were not an outcast body from the national life of Israel, but rather they enjoyed a certain measure of sympathy from the Pharisees" (Brandon, Fall of *Jerusalem,* p. 100). His argument is primarily based on an alleged incongruity and confusion *in* the record of the Acts which he discovers by comparing other ancient records of the era (see his chap. 6).

Moule is surely more in line with the reality of the situation when he writes: '<so far. then, as our only New Testament narratives go, there is no predisposition to expect other than Jewish origins for persecution. And if it is objected that the Acts is biased in this respect, because it is a studied apologia to the Roman government, the burden of proof rests with those who try to discredit its reliability here" (Moule, *Birth of New Testament,* 3rd cd., p. 159). He then proceeds to defend this evangelical position with considerable expertise (pp. 159ff.).

won from Judaism (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 18:8; 21:20-22; 28:23-24), and the Christians were, in fact, found operating in Jewish circles.[24] "When Paul comes into a city, he first goes into the synagogue and there preaches to the Jews. The synagogue is the natural center for him, for there he finds those who are interested in the subject. He only goes to the pagans when the Jews refuse to hear him, but even among the pagans he begins with those who have already developed a certain relationship to Judaism."[25] It is, of course, assumed by the non-Christian Jews that Judaism and Christianity were not one, for they zealously persecuted the Christians.

Up until the era of the mid-A.D. 60s (but not after A.D. 70) the Remans -were prone to identify Christianity as a sect of Judaism, intimately and necessarily bound up with it.[26] This was obviously due to: its object of worship (Christ, a Jew); its origin (Judea) and leadership (Jewish apostles), and the bulk of its membership (predominantly Jewish); its self-designation ("Israel of God" [Gal. 6:15], "seed of Abraham" [Gal. 3:29], "the circumcision" [Phil. 3:3] etc.); and its constant involvement in the religious life of the Jews. Sulpicius Severus reported that Titus's war council conducted before the siege of the Temple debated whether or not to destroy the Temple:

> Titus is said, after calling a council, to have first deliberated whether

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S. Angus commented rightly that "the first persecutions for the infant church came entirely from exclusive Judaism, and it was the Jews who first accused Christians before the Roman courts" (S. Angus, "Roman Empire" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1929] 42605).

Moule writes in this regard: "So in the Acts the narrative of actual persecution begins: and from start to finish it is instigated by the Jews. When the Gentiles do join in, it is only in the unthinking manner of excited mobs . . . , or because they momentarily imagine that their political peace is threatened. It is the Jews who are really the aggressors. . If one asks what New Testament references to the persecution of Christians are inescapably and demonstrably to be referred to Gentile action, there are extraordinarily few" (Moule, *Birth*, pp. 108-109).

24. Brandon may state the situation a little too strongly, but he is very close to an accurate assessment when he writes: "We have seen, partly on the evidence of the Acts itself, that the Jewish Christians remained firmly attached to their national faith and worshiped regularly in the Temple" (Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, p. 100).

25. Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Threshold of the Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia Fortress, 1985), p. 32.

26. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44; Sulpicius Severus, Sacred *History* 2:30. As Brandon notes, "the tendency to place an essential emphasis upon the Jewish origin [in these two writings] is clear" (Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, p. 121 n. 1).

> heshould destroy the temple, a structure of such extraordinary work. For it seemed good to some that a sacred edifice, distinguished above all human achievements, ought not to be destroyed. . . . But on the opposite side, others and Titus himself thought that the temple ought specially to be overthrown in order that the religion of the Jews and of the Christians might more thoroughly be subverted; for that these religions, although contrary to each other, had nevertheless proceeded from the same authors; that the Christians had sprung up from among the Jews; and that, if the root were extirpated, the offshoot would speedily perish.[27]

Clearly the idea here involved the belief in the dependence of Christianity upon the Temple.**

The early Christians were earnest in their concern to win Israel, even attempting to operate within the Temple-synagogue structure of Judaism.29 Nevertheless, there was a gradual cleavage between the Jew and Christianity that led to a final, irrevocable breach: "And then the breach was no doubt clinched by political circumstance. In the disastrous war of A.D. 66-70, the 'Nazarenes' (a term by then applied to the Jewish Christians) refused to participate in the Jewish resistance movement, the Zealot insurrection. . . . [T] he crisis of A.D. 66 decisively separated Jew from Christian."3°

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27. *Sacred History* 2:30.

28. This passage in Severus's writing is often doubted as to its historicity, largely on the basis of Josephus's contrary asseveration (Wars 6:4:3-7). Yet there is ample reason to believe that Severus had access to some document (possibly the lost portion of Tacitus's *Histories,* or the *De Iudaeis* by Antonius Julianus) that compelled him to accept the authenticity of the account over against Josephus, despite the extreme popularity of Josephus's writings among Christians. See the insightful defense given in Brandon, *The Fall o| Jerusalem,* p. 120, and E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule.* Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 20 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976) p. 324ff.

The matter is debated in the following P. de Labriolle, *History and Literature of Christianity* (London, 1924), p. 382. St. John Thackeray, *Josephus: the* Man *and the Historian (New* York, 1929), p. 37. H. Milman, *History of the Jews* (London, 1909), vol. 2, p. 90. W. D. Morrison, *The Jews Under Roman* Rule (London, 1890), p. 176. T. Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire* (London, 1886), vol. 2, p. 217. A. Momigliano, *Cambridge Ancient History,* vol 10: *The Augustan Empire, 44 B.C. – A.D 70 (New* York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 862. B. H. Streeter, *Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 11:* The Imperial *Peace, A.D. 70 – 192* (London: Cambridge, 1936), pp. 254ff.. R. Eider, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist,* trans. A. H. Drappe (London, 1931), pp. 552ff.

29. M. Goguel, *The Birth of Christianity,* trans. H. C. Snape (London: George Allen, 1953), pp. 510-530, even deemed the *raison d'etre* of Acts as seeking to secure a *religio licita* status for Christianity as the true Israel.

30. Moule, *Birth of New Testament,* 3rd cd., p. 59.

A Catena of Scholars

Many scholars recognize the significance of A.D. 70 in the separation of Judaism and Christianity. Perhaps a catena of their authoritative statements will prove helpful in throwing light upon the matter. Schaff writes:

> A few years afterwards followed the destruction of Jerusalem, which must have made an overpowering impression and broken the last ties which bound Jewish Christianity to the old theocracy. . . .
>
> The awful catastrophe of the destruction of the Jewish theocracy must have produced the profoundest sensation among the Christians. . . . It was the greatest calamity ofJudaism and a great benefit to Christianity; a refutation of the one, a vindication . . . of the other. It separated them forever. . . . Henceforth the heathen could no longer look upon Christianity as a mere sect of Judaism, but must regard and treat it as a new, peculiar religion. The destruction of Jerusalem, therefore, marks that momentous crisis at which the Christian church as a whole burst forth forever from the chrysalis of Judaism, awoke to a sense of maturity, and in government and worship at once took its independent stand before the world.[31]

Harnack agrees with this view when he notes that "it was the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple which seems to have provoked the final crisis, and led to a complete breach between the two parties [i.e., Jew and Christian] ."[32]

Ewald observes in this regard: "As by one great irrevocable stroke the Christian congregation was separated from the Jewish, to which it had clung as a new, vigorous offshoot to the root of the old tree and as the daughter to the mother."[33]

Henderson concurs: "The destruction of the Temple incidentally liberated Christianity from the gravest peril which still threatened the diffusion of the new religion, releasing it in its youthful years from shackles by which its straiter Jewish adherents, defiant of the memory of the Apostle of the Gentiles, sought to fetter and impede its growth. "[34]

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31. Schaff, *History,* 1:196,403-4.

32. Adolf Harnack, The *Mission* and *Expansion of Christianity in ths First Three Centuries,* 2 vols. *(New* York: Putnam, 1908) 1:63.

33. G. H. A. Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel,* 2nd cd., vol. 7, p. 171. Cited in Schaff, *History, 1* :404n.

34. B. W. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors* (Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 9.

In an introductory synopsis of his epilogue, Brandon writes of the matter: "Christianity twice-born. The Jewish overthrow of A.D. 70 emancipated the infant faith from its Jewish cradle, thus making possible its career as a world-religion. . . . The destruction of Jerusalem gave other cities decisive parts in the life of the Church, especially Rome. The Jewish catastrophe of A.D. 70 is probably the next most crucial event for Christianity after the Resurrection experiences."[35]

Bo Reicke writes that

> Despite the Zealot movement, the church thought it theologically and politically important to maintain a positive relationship with Jerusalem and Judaism, until the martyrdom of James in 62, the growth of terrorism, and the first Jewish War finally forced a break with organized Judaism. This long association elucidated the connection between the Old and the New Covenant. It also facilitated the conversion ofJews and the growth of the Christian community in the Roman Empire, where, from the time of Caesar to that of Nero, the prohibition of associations did not apply to the Jews and therefore also not to the Christians.[36]

Davies argues that the fall of Jerusalem made "absolute the divorce between Church and Synagogue," and further that "traces of Jewish Christianity are to be found in the following centuries, but the fall of Jerusalem reduced them to a position of complete insignificance for the future history of the Church. "3[7]

Dix writes that "the transition was made, and quickly, in the 'life of the Church.' The events of A.D. 66-70 hastened the concluding stages."3[8]

Frend states that "there can be little question of the members of the 'new Israel' desiring to break all links with the old in the period from 75 to 100."3[9]

Other scholars can be consulted on this matter.[40]

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35. Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, p. xix.

36. Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible From 500 B. C. to A.D. 100*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), p. 211. See also comments on pages 227,245,251.

37. J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), p. 46.

38. Dix, *Jew and Greek*, p. 111.

39. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, pp. 122-123.

40. For example: J. C. I. Gieseler, *Textbook of Ecclesiastical Hi-story*, trans. Francis Cunningham, vol. 1 (Philadelphia Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1836), pp. 55, 62.

Conclusion

The matter seems clear enough: When John wrote Revelation Christianity's situation was one in which it was still operating within Jewish circles and institutions to a very large extent. Its grammatical peculiarities and cultural allusions are evidently of a strongly Jewish color. Historically we know that this simply was not the case in the post-temple era beyond A.D. 70. The cleavage between Judaism and Christianity was too radical. Hence, this factor of the *Sitz im Leben* is indicative of a pre-70 date for Revelation.

Gerhard Uhlhorn, The *Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism*, ed. and trans. Egbert C. Smyth and C. J. H. Ropes, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1912), pp. 238-255. Merrill C. Tenney, New *Testament Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 303, 321. G. Ernest Wright, ed. *Great People of the Bible and How They Lived* (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest, 1974), pp. 390, 418-419. Howard Clark Kee, *Understanding the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), pp. 291ff. J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*. Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia Westminster, 1979), pp. 28ff. Maurice Gordon Dametz, *The Focal Points of Christian History (New* York Carlton, n.d.), p. 26. J. G. Davies, *The Early Church, in* E. O. James, cd., *History of Religion Series (New* York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, n.d.), p. 46.

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THE LOOMINGJEWISH WAR

As we press on in our argument, we move to a consideration of the fact that Israel's condition in Revelation bespeaks a time pre-A.D. 70, as well. This is especially evident in the portrayal of Israel's physical condition in the land.

Israel in the Land

In Revelation 7:1-8 we find an interesting temporary divine protection of "the land" (*γῆ*)[1] where four angels are seen holding back the winds of destruction:

> After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

Then follows the sealing of the 144,000 from the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

> The language and the manner in which the whole thing is stated could hardly more distinctly imply that the Jewish nation was still existing, and occupying its own land, — a land exposed to some impending desolation, from which the sealed, the one hundred and forty-four thousand, were to be exempt. The twelve tribes are named, notwithstanding so many of them had been lost, because the destruction revealed in connection with the sealing was to overtake the whole land

1. For the proper understanding of *γῆ* as a reference to "the land" (i.e., Israel), see earlier discussion in Chap. 8.

> ofJudaea, once the inheritance of and partitioned among these twelve tribes. It was a destruction that was to overtake Judaea; therefore Jewish Christians are alone selected.[2]

Clearly the reference to the Twelve Tribes is to Christians (as noted previously), for: (1) God intervenes to protect them, and (2) they are called "bond-servants of our God." Just as certainly may we understand that these are Christians of Jewish extraction, for: (1) they are in "the land" (w. 1, 2), and (2) they are contrasted with the "great multitude" from "every nation" who praise God (v. 9). The designation "Twelve Tribes" is another common means by which to refer to "the tribes of the land" (cp. Rev. 1:7). Here, however, it is not the entirety of the Twelve Tribes that is protected (the whole race of Israel, as such), but only 144,000 of them, i.e., "the cream of the crop," a perfect number,[3] those who have converted to Christ. Stuart presents a very logical question: "Why were these 144,000 designated by Jewish tribes?" His answer is most reasonable: it was because the pending destruction was threatened againstJudea; "ifnot, why should *Jewish* Christians alone be here mentioned and selected?"[4]

The fact that an angel intervenes *before* they are destroyed in the land surely indicates the era prior to the final and total devastation of the land in A.D. 70.[5] Were "the land" already destroyed (as it was in A.D. 70), such a protection would have been embarrassingly anachronistic. While speaking in the Olivet Discourse of the destruction of the very Temple to which the disciples could physically point (i.e., "Herod's Temple," Matt. 24:1-2), Jesus warned His followers that they should flee *Judea (24: 16)* when it was time for these things to come to pass (which occurred in A.D. 70). He added further that they should accept His promise that these horrendous events would be cut short (24:22), and that he who endured to the end would be

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2. James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), p. 157.

3. The number is the product of quantitative fullness (10) trebled (i.e., 10x 10x 10) from each tribe, and is multiplied by the number of tribes squared (12 x 12). On the number 10 see Steven Barabas, "Numbers," in Merrill C. Tenney, cd., *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 590.

4. Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1:274.

5. It must be remembered, as noted earlier, that the expectation of the book was of the soon occurrence of the events; Rev. 1:1, 3, 19; 3:10; 6:9; 22:7-12.

saved through it all (24:13). He also clearly taught that all of these things would happen to "this generation" (Matt. 2432). Indeed, this coming event was to be "the great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21) – the very tribulation in which John finds himself enmeshed even as he writes (Rev. 1:9; 2:22; cp. 7:14).

This impending destruction of Jerusalem prophesied by Christ casts its shadow backward over New Testament history. There are numerous indications of the portending destruction that was to come, even as early as in John the Baptist's ministry. In Matthew 3 :7ff. we read:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, *who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the axe is already laid at the root of the trees. . . . And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

There are a good number of prophetic statements in Christ's teaching regarding Jerusalem's demise (e.g., Matt. 21:33-46; 22:1-14; 23:31-38; 24: 1-34). Somewhat later in Acts 2: 16ff. the Pentecostal tongues event in Jerusalem was pointed to as a harbinger of "the day of the Lord" that was coming. Tongues-speaking was a warning sign to Peter's hearers of the necessity of their being "saved from this perverse generation" (Acts 2:40) before the "great and glorious day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20).[6] In Acts 2:43ff. and Acts 4:32ff. a strong case can be made showing that there was a practical motive to the Jerusalem church's selling of their property and sharing of the profits.[7] Such action was not commanded them, nor was it practiced elsewhere. This selling of property and distributing of the profits seems to have been related to the impending destruction of the city

6. See O. Palmer Robertson, "Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 *(1975-76)*:43ff.; Richard Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), pp. 102K.; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Crucial Issues* Regarding *Tongues* (Mauldin, SC: GoodBirth, 1982), pp. 14-20.

7. This does not deny, of course, the spiritual, brotherly love also involved in the situation.

prophesied by Jesus. The Jerusalem holocaust was coming in that generation and would render the land valueless. 1 Thessalonians 2:16 speaks of the Jews who "always fill up the measure of their sins" and upon whom "the wrath has come . . . to the utmost. " Hebrews 12:18-29 contrasts Judaism and its fulfillment, Christianity, and notes that there is an approaching "shaking" of the old order coming. There are many other Scriptural indications that point to something dramatic and earth-shaking that was coming upon the world and that would be felt in reverberations even beyond Judea.[8]

Thus, Revelation 7 is strongly indicative of a pre-fall Judea. After the Jewish War "Palestine was proclaimed a Roman province, and a great part of the land became the personal property of the emperor. But the country was in ruins, its once flourishing towns and villages almost without inhabitants, dogs and jackals prowling through the devastated streets and houses. In Jerusalem, a million people are reported to have penshed, with a hundred thousand taken captive to glut the slave markets of the empire. "g The evidence for the awfulness of the destruction is not based solely upon documentary testimony from Josephus, but it is also well-evidenced archaeologically:

> The recent excavations have provided striking evidence of Titus's destruction. . . . In the destruction of these buildings, walls were razed, paving stones torn up, and the drain clogged with material firmly dated to the last part of the century by the pottery. In the drain were human skulls and other bones, washed down from the ruined city higher up the slope.
>
> Even more dramatic were the finds in Site N, the area in which the fine street of Herod Agrippa was uncovered. Reference has already been made to the collapse of the staircase leading east from the street (p. 165). The tumble of stones was remarkable even for Jerusalem where tumbles of stones are a phenomenon all too common in excavations. The magnitude of the disaster perhaps made a special impact owing to the excellence of the destroyed buildings as shown by the magnificently-dressed stones, and the period of the collapse was very precisely pin-pointed by the discovery at its base of a hoard of coins of the First Revolt, hidden by defenders who could not recover them

8. E.g., Rem. 13:11, 12; 1 Cor. 7:26, 29-31; Col. 3:6; Heb. 10:25, 37; James. 5:8, 9; 1 Pet. 45, 7; 1 John 2:17-18.

9. Rufus Learsi, Israel: *A History of the Jewish People* (*New York* World, 1949), p. 178.

> before the city was overwhelmed by Titus. Even more indicative of the complete desolation of this area that had formed part of the city of Herod Agrippa was thestate of the ruins. . . . It was two centuries or more before human activity began once more to make its mark in the whole area of ancient Jerusalem. [10]

Of Titus's final siege, it can be asserted that "the ensuing slaughter and destruction were terrible."' [1] The land after the war was devastated; the Roman troops settled in as a policing presence: "When Titus departed after his capture of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the city was in ruins, and the Xth Legion Fretensis was left to control the ruins." [12] Consequently, upon the A.D. 95-96 hypothesis, there would be no need for the angels protectively to seal Christians from the devastation: it already would have occurred.

In Revelation 11 there is additional evidence of Jerusalem's pre-fall state. As discussed previously, the Temple is portrayed as still intact and under Jewish control (Rev. 11:1, 2); the "treading" of the courts is foreseen as a *future* occurrence (Rev. 11:2 note the future πατήσουσιν). In addition to this, Revelation 11:8 suggests that Jerusalem's streets were intact at the time of John's writing: "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. "

After Titus's final five-month siege, however, the city was totally destroyed, the Temple was dismantled, and all fell under Roman control. Josephus, a witness to the tragedy and the author of the only surviving contemporary eyewitness account of Jerusalem's fall, writes: "and now the Remans set fire to the extreme parts of the city, and burnt them down, and entirely demolished its walls." [13] Later he reports that

> as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury, (for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other such work to be done), Caesar gave orders that they should not demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and

10. Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Jerusalem: Excavating 3000 Years of History (New* York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp. 185ff.

11. Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jerusalem (New* York: Praeger, 1974), p. 254.

12. Kenyon, *Jerusalem: Excavating,* p. 187.

13. *Wars* 6:9:4.

> Mariamne, and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison; as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valour had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind. [14]

This corroborates Kenyon's remarks, already cited: "The recent excavations have provided striking evidence of Titus's destruction. . . . In the destruction of these buildings, walls were razed, paving stones torn up, and the drain clogged with material firmly dated to the last part of the century by the pottery." [15]

> When the sack of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was completed, Titus left the Xth *Legio Frentensis* to watch over the ruins. Its headquarters were on the site of Herod's palace on the western ridge, where the three towers of the palace and a part of the west wall were left standing to form part of the defences of the legionary headquarters, which continued there until A.D. 200. . . . Some Jews continued to live in Jerusalem, but the tragic difference was that there was no longer a Temple in which the full ceremonial of the worship of Yahweh could be carried out. [16]

Reicke writes of the aftermath:

> Under the emperors of the Julio-Claudian house, the Holy Land had been a procuratorship and temple territory. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70, its population had been reduced, but the country was by no means dejudaized. It did, however, lose its relative independence and autarchy; it remained the land of the Jews only ethnically, not politically. Palestine was in fact treated as an imperial province and, for the first time during the Roman period, expropriated. Important sites were claimed as Roman colonies for soldiers and veterans, including Caesarea, the newly-founded Flavia Neapolis near Shechem, Em-

14. *Wars* 7:1:1.
15. Kenyon, Jerusalem: *Excavating,* p. 185.
16. Kenyon, *Digging Up Jerusalem,* p. 256.

maus, and the environs of Jerusalem. Caesarea remained the official residence; the governor, however, was no longer a procurator but the general of the Tenth Legion (called "*Fretensis*"), whose soldiers were quartered after thewar mostly in the vicinity of Jerusalem, in part at Qumran.[17]

History records that after the Jewish War there was a "permanent presence of a legion defiling the holy city with military standards which were objects of cult, and . . . [an] accompanying civilian settlement containing pagan shrines as well as baths, shops and other amenities. . . ."[18] All of this fits well with a pre-A.D. 70 situation.

The Expectation of War

The bulk of the book of Revelation carries out the theme stated in Revelation 1:7. That is, the majority of the scenes in Revelation deal with *judgment* – a judgment interspersed, of course, with songs of triumph from the persecuted Christians. This judgment is the direct result of Christ's "judgment coming" (see especially the bulk of Rev. 6-19). If the previous argumentation heretofore is generally accurate, then we would expect that these judgment scenes, despite their frequent symbolic garb, would preserve at least kernels of historical events. And if so, then in light of the thrust of the present study, we should rightly expect to document from Revelation certain historical indicators of the Jewish War with Rome (sometimes called "The Great Revolt"). In this section of our analysis, we will point out significant indicators in Revelation that fit hand-in-glove with the historical records of the Jewish War.

If traces of the Jewish War do exhibit themselves in Revelation, a conservative analysis of the matter would lead the devout Christian to conclude that Revelation was written *prior* to the War, in light of his conviction as to the supernatural character of true predictive prophecy. The conservative Christian need not resort either to an *ex eventu* interpretation or to multi-documentary, editorialized form-critical hypotheses. As Stuart points out in regard to Revelation's theme verse (Rev. 1:7):

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17. Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B. C. to A.D. 100*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia Fortress, 1968), p. 266.

18. E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule.* Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 20 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), p. 346.

> Here then, on the very front of the book, is exhibited a title-page, as it were, indicative of a conspicuous part of the contents of the work. The punishment of the unbelieving and persecuting Jew must follow the coming of the Lord; and this it is one leading object of the book to illustrate and confirm. If so, then the *prediction* must have preceded the event predicted.'9

The Ease of Application to the Jewish War

As a matter of fact – and quite surprisingly to the modern evangelical Christian – much of Revelation's vivid imagery lends itself admirably to the catastrophic events of the Jewish War. And if the imagery does fit reasonably well, such would suggest at least the *prima facie* plausibility of the argument for an early date – a date that has been demonstrated on other, more certain grounds. Contrariwise, if it were incapable of explication from history, the overall argument would be greatly weakened. Of course, many of the historical judgment elements could satisfy the situation in various ancient wars,[20] and others are open to contrary interpretive analysis. But, with a number of the distinctive elements, there are simply too many converging lines of evidence pointing to the Jewish War to allow for this argument's hasty a *priori* dismissal.[21]

> The reason why the early date and mainly contemporary explanation of the book is daily winning fresh adherents among unbiased thinkers of every Church and school, is partly because it rests on so simple and secure a basis, and partly because no other can compete with it. It is indeed the only system which is built on the plain and repeated statements and indications of the Seer himself, and the corresponding events are so closely accordant with the symbols as to make it certain

19. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:273,

20. But the relevance factor and the contemporary expectation of Revelation work against such a diversion.

21. Many of these will have to be left to an exegetical and expository commentary on Revelation itself, on which the present writer is currently working. For illuminating insights, the reader can peruse the following Stuart, *Apocalypse,* vol. 2. P.S. Desprez, *The Apocalypse Fulfilled*, 2nd ed. (London: Longrnan, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1855). Thomas Whittemore, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John, the Divine* (Boston: James M. Usher, 1856), pp. 45ff. J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1887] 1983), pp. 365-537. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), *passim.*

that this scheme of interpretation is the only one that can sttrvive.[22]

A quick survey of some of the more general correspondences will introduce the matter. Following this, we will list some of the more specific correspondences.

General Correspondences

Some of the judgment and tribulation scenes in Revelation are borne out of contemporary persecutions (e.g., Rev. 1:9), others expect a soon occurrence of the awful events. These scenes veritably breathe "a time of wild commotion,"[23] horrendous devastation, and destructive upheaval. As has been pointed out earlier, the era of the late A.D. 60s is far more tumultuous than that of the 90s, and probably of any era up to the overthrow of the Roman empire centuries later. In A.D. 64 Nero initiated the first and probably the most horrible[24] persecution of Christianity by Rome. From A.D. 67 to 70 the Jewish War was officially engaged and raged with peculiar severity, laying waste the Temple, Jerusalem, and much of Judea. In A.D. 68-69 the Roman Civil Wars nearly toppled mighty Rome, bringing the horror of war upon the capital city itself, during the "Year of the Four Emperors."

Such events as these are easily capable of stylized expression in many of Revelation's passages. The persecution of the Christians by Nero is evidently portrayed in Revelation 13.25 The destruction of Israel ("the land") during the Jewish War is the main theme of the book (Rev. 1:7) and is evident in Revelation 6, 8, 9, 11, 14-18.[26] The woes upon the Roman Beast are indicated in Revelation 13:10; 19:19-21. These represent some of the general allusions in Revelation

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22. Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity* (New York: Cassell, 1884), p. 434.

23. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xxvi.

24. Schaff wrote "the Neronian persecution [was] the most cruel that ever occurred" (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1910) 1950] 1:386).

25. Other evidences of martyrdom and persecution (in Rev. 6; 11; 17) seem to be related to Jewish persecution, the main focus of the book being on the judgment of the "tribes of the land" (Rev. 1:7). See Chap. 17.

26. Briefly, the evidence for the identifying of Jerusalem as the Harlot is based on the following (1) Both are called "the great city" (Rev. 148; 11:8). (2) The Harlot is tilled with the blood of the saints (cp. Rev. 16:6;17:6;18:21,24; with Matt. 23:34-48; Luke 13:33; Acts 7:51-52). (3) Jerusalem had previously been called by pagan names quite

to historical events. We will now give in more detail a few of some of the more remarkable and more specific historical correspondences.

Revelation 6:3-4

In Revelation 6:3-4 the Greek text emphasizes the disruption of "*the* peace": "And when He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come.' And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth (τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς), and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him." This well suits the temporary breach of the famed *Pax Romana,* which was ruptured by the events of the A.D. 60s.

> By about 4 B. C., Augustus had finished most of his constitutional reforms in the Roman Empire, and the Roman system of government was fixed for the next several decades. This stability is typified by the succession, which remained in the Augustan line until the suicide of Nero A.D. 68. Politically, this was the period of the *Pax Romana* throughout the Empire. Augustus' inauguration of an Age of Peace at the *Ludi Saeculares* in 17 B.C. (Horace Carmen *saeculare*) was not an empty gesture. In the Roman Empire proper, this period of peace remained comparatively undisturbed until the time of Nero. Like two harbingers of revolution, however, a fire broke out in Rome in 64 and

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compatible with the designation "Babylon" (cp. Rev. 148 and 17:5 with 11 :8). (4) Rome could not fornicate against God, for only Jerusalem was God's wife (Rev. 17:2-5, cp. Isa. 1 :20; Jer. 31:31). (5) There is an obvious contrast between the Harlot and the chaste bride (cp. Rev. 17:2-5 with Rev. 21:1ff.) that suggests a contrast with the Jerusalem below and the Jerusalem above (Rev. 21 :2; cp. Gal. 4:24ff.; Heb. 12: 18ff.). The fact that the Harlot is seated on the seven-headed Beast (obviously representative of Rome) indicates not identity with Rome, but alliance with Rome against Christianity (cp. Matt. 23:37ff.; John 19: 16-16; Acts 17:7).

Fuller discussion and elaboration of the identity of the Harlot as Jerusalem can be found in the following Russell, *Parousia,* pp. 482ff. Vacher Burch, *Anthropology and the Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1939), *passim.* Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Search t/u Scriptures,* trans. Theodore Plantinga, vol. 10 *Hebrews – Revelation* (St. Catharines, Ontario Paideia, 1979), pp. 79K. Desprez, *Apocalypse Fulfilled, passim.* Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey and Biblical Prophecy* (Ontario Paideia, 1978), pp. 104-139. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation.* Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 277ff.; Chilton, *Days of Vengeance,* pp. 42 1ff. Also a forthcoming commentary by the present author: *The Divorce of Israel: A Commentary on Revelation.*

This view has also been held by F. Abauzit, J. G. von Herder, J. J. Wetstein, J. C. Harenberg, F. G. Hartwig, Holweerda, K. Schilder, and others (for documentation see Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1:278 and Vanderwaal, *Hal Lindsey* p. 117).

> a war at Zion in 66; after Nero's death, the whole Roman Empire was ablaze and at war during the year 69. The same *homo novus* who conquered the Jews, Vespasian, was soon able to restore the power of the emperors, but upon a new foundation.[27]

This was spoken of by Origen as the "abundance of peace that began at the birth of Christ. "2[8] Latourette states that "the internal peace and order which Augustus achieved endured, with occasional interruptions, for about two centuries."[29]

Due to this famed, empire-wide peace, Christ's prophetic reference to "wars and rumors of wars" (Matt. 246, 7), which were to occur in His "generation" (Matt. 24:34), serves as a remarkably significant "sign" (Matt. 24:3-8, 33) of the end of the Temple and the Jewish age (Matt. 24:2, 3, 15-16). And as such they find expression also in John's version of the Olivet Discourse, i.e., Revelation.[30]

Revelation 6:4

The same text indicates civil war in "the land": "it was granted to take peace from the earth (lit., the land), and that men should slay one another" (Rev. 6:4). Josephus is emphatic in his assessment of the calamities that befell the Jews. He insists that the carnage wrought by internecine strife in Israel wreaked more destruction upon themselves than that brought upon them by the Remans.[3]1 One citation will suffice as evidence:

> There were, besides, disorders and civil wars in every city; and all those that were at quiet from the Remans turned their hands one against another. There was also a bitter contest between those that were fond of war, and those that were desirous of peace. . . . [I]nsomuch that for barbarity and iniquity those of the same nation did no

27. Reicke, *New Testament Era,* pp. 109-110.

28. Origen, *Remans* 1:3.

29. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity,* 2nd cd., 2 vols. (New York Harper & Row, 1975) 1:21. See also Joseph Ward Swain, *The Harper History of Civilization, vol.* 1 *(New* York: Harper & Bros., 1958), pp. 15 1ff. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church,* 3rd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 3. John Laurence von Mosbeim, *History of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, vol.* 1 (New York: Converse, 1854), p. 11.

30. It is interesting that John is the only writer of a canonical Gospel who omits Christ's Olivet Discourse announcement of the destruction of the Temple and the end of the age. It would seem almost certain that this is due to the fact that he had treated it earlier in his Revelation. See earlier discussion.

31. *Wars* 4:3:2, 10. Cp. 4:6:10; 5:1:1,5.

> way differ from the Remans; nay, it seemed to be a much lighter thing to be ruined by the Remans than by themselves.[32]

It surely is not a mere accidental correspondence with history that is indicated in the fateful war scenes in Revelation. Whereas war with one's enemy generally has the effect of unifying a people, Israel's situation was the exact opposite of this.

Revelation 6:5-6

Another extremely significant factor in the Jewish War (probably one of the three leading factors of devastation, along with the assault of the mighty Roman imperial forces and the internal civil strife) was the horrible gravity of the famine that ravished Jerusalem's beleaguered populace. The famine is graphically depicted in Revelation 6:5-6: "And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, 'Come.' And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.'" Again Josephus gives emphatic testimony to the role of famine during the War.[33] One piece of evidence from Josephus will illustrate the matter:

> But the famine was too hard for all other passions, and it is destructive to nothing so much as to modesty; for what was otherwise worthy of reverence, was in this case despised; insomuch that children pulled the very morsels that their fathers were eating, out of their very mouths, and what was still more to be pitied, so did the mothers do as to their infants. . . .[34]

Revelation 7:1-7

The protection of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem is indicated in Revelation 7:1-7 where the well-known sealing of the 144,000 is revealed. It has been shown already that this refers to the providential protection of those Christians ofJewish lineage who were "in the land." An extremely interesting and famous piece of tradition informs

32. *Wars* 4:3:2.

33. *Wars* 5:10:2-5; 5:12:3; 6:3:1-5. It may even be that the reference to "the oil and the wine" finds expression in the adulteration of the sacred oil and wine by the Jews themselves; *Wars* 5:13:6.

34. *Wars* 5:10:5. See also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:6.

us that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem escaped the city before it was too late,[35] possibly either at the outset of the War or during one of its providential lulls. Eusebius records the situation thus:

> But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Peres called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men.[36]

Although contradicting Eusebius on some minor points, Epiphanies also records this account of the escape of the Christians from Jerusalem.[37] Josephus records a major lull in the War, which would provide opportunity for escape: when Vespasian was distracted by Rome's Civil War.[38]

Revelation 11:1,2

The reference to the treading of the Temple's courts (Rev. 11:1, 2) will be bypassed, in that it has been treated already .39 We should be aware, however, of its relevance here as a distinctive and non-repeatable episode of the Jewish War.

Revelation 14:19-20

The role of the bridle-depth blood in Revelation 14:19-20 is as fascinating as terrifying: "And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles."

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35. Brandon is surely wrong when he asserts that the Jewish church perished in the conflagration that overtook Jerusalem; S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of A.D. 70 on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1957), chap. 9. He follows Schwartz, *Goth. Nachr. (1907) 1:284.*

36. *Ecclesiastical History* 3:5:3.

37. Epiphanies, *Heresies* 29:7 and *De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 15. James J. L. Ratton wen argues that Revelation was written for the very purpose of warning the Christians to flee Jerusalem; *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1912), pp. 3-5.

38. *Wars* 4:9:2.

39. See Chap. 11.

Perhaps one of the most surprising correspondences between the graphic portrayal of Revelation and the historical events of the Jewish War is this one. Josephus records for us several episodes of the Jewish War that most reasonably could be a fulfillment of this prophecy:

> [B]ut as many of these were repulsed when they were getting ashore as were killed by the darts upon the lake; and the Remans leaped out of their vessels, and destroyed a great many more upon the land: one might then see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped. And a terrible stink, and a very sad sight there was on the following days over that country; for as for the shores, they were full of shipwrecks, and of dead bodies all swelled. . . .[40]
>
> . . . .
>
> At which fight, hand to hand, fifteen thousand of them were slain, while the number of those that were unwillingly forced to leap into Jordan was prodigious. There were besides, two thousand and two hundred taken prisoners. . . . Now this destruction that fell upon the Jews, as it was not inferior to any of the rest in itself, so did it still appear greater than it really was; and this, because not only the whole of the country through which they had fled was filled with slaughter, and Jordan could not be passed over, by reason of the dead bodies that were in it, but because the lake Asphaltitis was also full of dead bodies, that were carried down into it by the river. . . .[41]
>
> . . . .
>
> [I]n Jerusalem [the dead] obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood.[42]

Those evangelical scholars who doubt that the symbols of Revelation have any correspondence with historical events should carefully note this particular one. A more exact fulfillment is scarcely imaginable.

Revelation 16:21

One final reference will be given at this juncture. In Revelation 16:2 1a we read: "And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds

40. *Wars* 3:10:9.
41. Wars 4:7:5-6.
42. Wars 6:8:5.

(KJV: one talent) each, came down from heaven upon men." It is quite impossible that such gargantuan hailstones can be accounted for under the most aggravated of meteorological conditions. Yet Josephus records for us an event so visually and effectually similar that what he records must be the fulfillment of the Revelational prophecy:

> The engines [i.e., catapults], that all the legions had ready prepared for them, were admirably contrived; but still more extraordinary ones belonged to the tenth legion: those that threw darts and those that threw stones, were more forcible and larger than the rest, by which they not only repelled the excursions of the Jews, but drove those away that were upon the walls also. Now, the stones that were cast, were of the weight of a talent, and were carried two furlongs and further. The blow they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them for a great space. As for the Jews, they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was a white colour.[43]

Not only is the size mentioned the same (one talent, Gk: *ταλαντιαῖος*), but the boulders thrown by the Roman catapults were white colored, as are hailstones. Would not the effect of the catapulting stones be virtually that of a hailstorm of such proportions?

Although there are many other such military evidences along these lines that could be forwarded, these will suffice to illustrate the point: Revelation's prophecies find an impressive fulfillment in almost literal fashion in the Jewish War. And since Revelation is accepted by evangelical scholars as canonical and prophetic, these events must lie in the near future from John's perspective. Thus, a pre-A.D. 70 date for the composition of Revelation is necessary.[44]

The Correspondence of Time Frames

Not only are there historical events associated with the Jewish War that fit nicely with the statements of Revelation, but there are certain time-frame indications that find a most interesting correspondence with those presented in Revelation. And although these occur in a highly symbolic book and in symbolic contexts, their literal time-function should not be discounted as wholly non-historical.

43. *Wars* 5:6:3.

44. It must be remembered that these evidences are not the sole ones. All the argumentation given above is to be understood when considering these. These are more or less supplementary strands.

Such should not be done even in non-canonical apocalyptic literature, as fantastic as it is. For instance, the "thirty years" of the apocalyptic 2 Esdras 3:1 seems clearly to indicate a specific time-frame:

> A date of thirty years after A.D. 70 corresponds, at least in very general terms, with the date which on other grounds seems probable for the composition of 2 Esdras 3-14. From the vision recorded in chs. 11-12 it seems clear that this work was composed during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 91-96). Unless the thirty years are totally out of step with reality, the evidence of 3:1 suggests that we should think in terms of the end, rather than the beginning, of Domitian's reign. . . .[45]

Thus, it is not without parallel in the more extravagant apocalyptic literature. The three time-frame statements to be investigated are found in Revelation 9:5, 10; Revelation 11:2;% and Revelation 13:5.

Revelation 9:5, 10

Revelation 9:1-12 clearly seems to speak of demons under the imagery of locusts (perhaps due to their destructive power and the gnawing agony they cause). A great many commentators agree that, stripped of the poetical imagery, the locusts are really demons and their sting is that of the pain and influence of demonic oppression. This seems to be quite clearly the case in light of their origin (the bottomless pit, 9:1 -3), their task (they afflict only men, 9:4), and their ruler ("the angel of the abyss," surely Satan, 9:11). Were this a reference to the Roman army (or some other later army), their restriction from killing (Rev. 9:5, 10) would be inexplicable in that the Roman army actually did destroy thousands of the Jews in its assault. But if these are demons, and the physical killing is left to the armies (which are seen later, Rev. 9: 13ff.), the picture begins to come into focus.

If demons are in view in this passage, this fits well with requirements of the early date and the prophetic expectation of Christ in Matthew 12:38-45. There Christ teaches that during His earthly

45. R. J. Coggins, in Coggins and M. A. Knibb, *The First and Second Books of Esdras*. Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (London: Cambridge, 1979), p. 115. Metzger agrees; Bruce M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in James H. Charlesworth, cd., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:520,

46. Rev. 11:3 will not be treated. Almost certainly its time-frame is concurrent with the one in 11:2 and the events are simultaneous.

ministry He had cast out demons in Israel, but because of Israel's resistance to His message, the demons will return in greater numbers within the "generation. "[47]

In Revelation 9:5 and 10 we read: "And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for *five months;* and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. . . . And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months." To what special period might this five-month period of demon-affliction correspond? With what events might we expect that a demonically enhanced torment was involved? Remarkably, we have record of a five-month episode in the Jewish War that serves well as fulfillment of such prophetic expectations.

A good case can be made for the era of the final siege of Jerusalem by Titus, after his legions hemmed in the defenders of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Regarding the time-frame involved, it should be noted that "Titus began the siege of Jerusalem in April, 70. The defenders held out desperately for five months, but by the end of August the Temple area was occupied and the holy house burned down, and by the end of September all resistance in the city had come to an end ."[48] E. W. G. Masterman notes that "the siege commenced on the 14th of Nisan, 70 A.D., and ended on the 8th of Elul, a total of 134 days."[49] This is a period, less just a few days, of virtually five months' duration. And surely it was the most grim and distressing period of Jerusalem's resistance, for the hand-writing was on the wall: there was no escape. It was just a matter of time before the enraged Roman legions would pour into the beleaguered city to cruelly slaughter men, women, and children. The situation was hopelessly desperate for the defenders.

Although Josephus makes no express reference to demonical possession, that the period was a demon-enhanced era seems evident from the record of the case. Josephus does record the extreme barbar-

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47. Had not the Jews been presented with the Kingdom of God by Christ (Mark 1:15; Matt. 13)? Are there not but two spiritual kingdoms: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (Acts 26: 18; Co]. 1:13)? Having rejected God's Kingdom might it not be expected that they would receive the fruit of such rejection: initiation into the kingdom of Satan, attended by his nefarious angelic hosts?

48. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 382. Cf. Josephus, *Wars 5.*

49. E. W. G. Masterman, "Jerusalem" in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [ISBE]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1915) 3:1619. Schaff computes the dates according to the Julian calendar as from April, 70, to August 10, 70; *History* 1:396.

ity and iniquity of Jerusalem during these final days. The cruelty especially of the seditious leaders of the revolt (the *sicarii*, or zealots) increased rapidly as the final pall of doom settled over the exhausted, terrified, starving, dying, and doomed masses:

> The madness of the seditious did also increase together with their famine, and both those miseries were every day inflamed more and more. . . .[50]
>
> It is therefore impossible to go distinctly over every instance of these men's iniquity. I shall therefore speak my mind here at once briefly: – That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness than this was from the beginning of the world. . . .[51]
>
> And here I cannot but speak my mind, and what the concern I am under dictates to me, and it is this: — I suppose that had the Remans made any longer delay in coming against those villains, the city would either have been swallowed up by the ground opening upon them, or been overflowed by water, or else been destroyed by such thunder as the country of Sodom perished by, for it had brought forth a generation of men much more atheistical than were those that suffered such punishments; for by their madness it was that all the people came to be destroyed .52

Surely such barbarous conduct against their own families and friends is evidence of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of covenantal curse in Matthew 12:40.53 Had not Jesus spoken to the leaders of the Jews and said they were of their father the devil (John 8:44)? Stier is not amiss in his summary of the condition of the Jews who set themselves "against the Lord and His anointed" (Acts 4:25ff.) in the first century: "In the period between the ascension of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem, this nation shows itself, one might say, as if possessed by seven thousand devils. "5[4]This condition became even more dramatically evident in the final days of the defense of Jerusalem, as Henderson rightly observed: "Meanwhile that unhappy city during all this year of grace had been prey to the most bloody

50. *Wars* 5:10:2.
51. *Wars* 5:10:5.
52. *Wars* 5:13:6.
53. For other Josephianic references, see *Wars* 5:1:1; 5:1:4-5; 5:12:4; 6:8:5.
54. In *Reden Jew 2:187.* Cited in Russell, *Parousia*, p. 412n.

anarchy and demoniacal fanaticism. "5[5]

So here we have in Revelation a time period of five months that is of demonic character. The striking applicability of Revelation 9 to the five month siege of Jerusalem by Titus is surely confirmatory of the identifying of the Revelational prophecies with the events of the Jewish War. That being the case, this passage serves also as a subsidiary demonstration of the pre-A.D. 70 date of Revelation.

Revelation 11:2

This verse has been dealt with rather extensively previously, nevertheless, we will now address the time-frame element contained within it. The verse reads: "And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months." Here stands a specifically defined era during which the "holy city" (i.e., Jerusalem, the historical capital and geographical center of Israel) will be down-trodden. This periodic statement is followed up by its equivalent in the next verse, which speaks of 1260 days (42 months x 30 days each = 1260 days). If, indeed, the pre-A.D. 70 date is correct, then this time-frame must somehow comport with the Jewish War.

Now a most interesting historical fact throws light upon this passage, if we hold the pre-A.D. 70 date. And that fact is that it took almost exactly forty-two months for Rome to get into a position to destroy the Temple in the Jewish War of A.D. 67-70. Now it is true that the Jewish Revolt, at least from the Jewish side, actually began with a series of events caused by the overbearing and careless Roman procurator Gessius Florus from May through November in the year 66.[56] Because of the procurator's mismanagement, Neapolitanus, a Roman military tribune, was sent from Antioch by Cestius Gallus, the Roman governor of Syria, to urge restraint upon the Jews.[57] The effort was in vain, for by November, Cestius Gallus had to march

55. B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London: Methuen, 1903), p. 374.

56. Including scattered riots, the cessation of sacrifices for the emperor, and sporadic warfare. See Reicke, *New Testament Era,* pp. 254ff. Bruce, *History,* pp. 378K. Henderson, *Life and Principate,* pp. 368ff. W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984)> pp. 120ff.

57. Josephus, *Wars* 2:14-17.

against Judea because of the resultant disaffection and widespread mayhem.

The events of the year A.D. 66, however, should not be considered a judgment against the Jews. This is because the Jewish forces actually (and mysteriously!) gained the upper hand against the troops of the governor of Syria. Josephus records the retreat of Cestius in haste and fear amid the rejoicing of the Jews:

> There it was that Cestius stayed two days; and was in great distress to know what he should do in these circumstances; but when, on the third day, he saw a still greater number of enemies, and all the parts round about him full of Jews, he understood that his delay was to his own detriment, and that if he stayed the longer there, he should have still more enemies upon him.
>
> That therefore he might fly the faster, he gave orders to cast away what might hinder his army's march. . . . [But when his troops were soon trapped in difficult circumstances by the Jews] the distress they were at last in was so great, that they betook themselves to lamentations, and to such mournful cries as men use in the utmost despair: the joyful acclamations of the Jews also, as they encouraged one another, echoed the sounds back again, these last composing a noise of those that at once rejoiced and were in a rage. Indeed these things were come to such a pass, that the Jews had almost taken Cestius's entire army prisoners, had not the night come on, when the Remans fled to Bethoron, and the Jews seized upon all the places round about them, and watched for their coming out in the morning.
>
> And then it was that Cestius, despairing of obtaining room for a public march, contrived how he might best run away. . . . [But] the Jews went on pursuing the Remans as far as Antipatris; after which, seeing they could not overtake them, they came back and took the engines, and spoiled the dead bodies; and gathered the prey together which the Remans had left behind them, and came back running and singing to their metropolis; while they had themselves lost a few only, but had slain of the Remans five thousand and three hundred footmen, and three hundred and eighty horsemen. This defeat happened on the eighth day of the month Dius, in the twelfth year of the reign of Nero. . . .[58]
>
> Now the Jews, after they had beaten Cestius, were so much elevated with their unexpected success, that they could not govern their zeal,

58. Wars 2:19:7-9.

> but, like people blown up into a flame by their good fortune, carried the war to remoter places .59

As Bruce sees it: "This initial success for the revolt discredited the moderates and leaders of the peace-party in the public eye, and encouraged the insurgents to organize the whole Jewish population of Palestine for the war of liberation. "[60] Almost immediately the Jews, though by no means united, "betook themselves to make preparations for the war with the Remans."[61]

After this humiliating misfortune for the governor, word was sent to the emperor Nero to apprise him of the situation regarding "the great distress" Cestius was in.[62] As Josephus records it: "When Nero was informed of the Remans' ill success in Judea, a concealed consternation and terror, as is usual in such cases, fell upon him."[63] Nero deliberated on the matter and then formally commissioned a seasoned general, Vespasian, to make preparations to put down what had become a revolt against Imperial Rome and the *Pax Romana*.[64] "Vespasian received his commission from Nero, i.e., the war was declared . . . , the first part of Feb., A.D. 67."[65] This was the formal declaration of war by Rome against Israel. Shortly thereafter, Vespasian entered northern Israel on his march to Jerusalem going forth "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2). According to Bruce, Vespasian "arrived the following spring [i.e., the spring of A.D. 67] to take charge of operations."[66] This marked the official entry of Roman imperial forces into the campaign. Jerusalem and the Temple finally fell and were utterly destroyed by Titus, Vespasian's son, in late summer, A.D. 70: "Titus began the siege of Jerusalem in April, 70. The defenders held out desperately for five months, but by the end of August the Temple area was occupied and the holy house burned down, and by the end of September all resistance in the city had come to an end."[67]

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59. *Wars 3:2:1.*
60. Bruce, *History*, p. 381. See also Henderson, *Life* and *Principate*, pp. 370ff.
61. *Wars 2:22:1.*
62. *Wars 2:20:1.*
63. *Wars* 3:1:1.
64. *Wars 3:1:2-3.*
65. Macdonald, *Life* and *Writings of John*, p. 212 n. 1. See also Schaff, *History* 1:395.
66. Bruce, *History*, p. 381.
67. Bruce, *History*, p. *382. See* Josephus, *Wars 7:1.* Except for three renegade pockets of resistance scattered about the Judean wilderness, the war was considered won by

Now from the time of this official imperial engagement in the Jewish War (early Spring, A.D. 67) until the time of the Temple's destruction and Jerusalem's fall (early September, A.D. 70) is a period right at the symbolic figure of 1260 days (or 42 months or $3^1/_2$ years). Indeed, counting backward from early September, A.D. 70, we arrive 42 months earlier at early March — in the Spring of 67! Surely this figure cannot be dismissed as sheer historical accident. Though the time-frame undoubtedly carries with it the foreboding spiritual connotation associated with a broken seven (31/2 is one-half of the perfect number 7), nevertheless, we are also driven to recognize the providence of God in these historical affairs. In keeping with divinely ordained symbol, in fulfillment of divinely inspired prophecy, it did, as a matter of fact, take Rome 3' /2 years to trample Israel and the city of Jerusalem totally. Under the providence of God the symbolic "broken seven" became the literal time-frame of Jerusalem's doom. Stuart surmises: "After all the investigation which I have been able to make, I feel compelled to believe that the writer refers to a literal and definite period, although not so exact that a single day, or even a few days, of variation from it would interfere with the object he has in view. It is certain that the invasion of the Romans lasted just about the length of the period named, until Jerusalem was taken."[68]

Thus, again, we have a time-frame that is wholly consistent with historical circumstances associated with the Jewish War – a time-frame that lends further strength to the pre-A.D. 70 argument for Revelation.

Revelation 13:5-7

In Revelation 13:5-7 the events are separated in time and geography from the events of the Jewish War, but, as we will see, the circumstances well fit the pre-A.D. 70 era. The passage before us reads:

Rome when the capital of the nation and the strongest point of resistance fell. Titus returned to Rome by 71 to celebrate a joint victory celebration with his father, Vespasian, now the new emperor. See also Reicke, New *Testament Era,* pp. 266ff. Walker, *History,* p. 30. C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of New Testament,* 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 172ff. Masterman, ZSBE41619.

68. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:218.

> And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

Many commentators recognize the reference to the Beast spoken of here (see Rev. 13:1, 2, 4) as a reference to imperial Rome. We demonstrated previously, that the Beast's seven heads represent both the seven hills of Rome and the succession of seven emperors from the time of Julius (cf. Rev. 17:9, 10). We also saw that the number of the Beast (considered specifically, rather than generically) is a cryptogram expressive of the name "Nero Caesar." We need not re-argue these identifications here, although they should be kept in mind. Clearly this is first century Rome in view, and specifically the most beastly of its emperors, Nero. But where does the time-frame fit in?

In light of the evidence above, the "war" of the Beast against "the saints" undoubtedly refers to the Neronic persecution of Christianity, the first imperial persecution of the faith. This is not Nero's war against the Jews, for these persecuted people are designated by John as "saints" (Rev. 13:7). These are those whose names have "been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" (Rev. 13:8). His assault upon them is tantamount to "blasphemies against God" (Rev. 13:6).

The express delimitation of the Beast's persecution of the saints is a period of 42 months. Interestingly, the Neronic persecution lasted just about that very length of time:

> The persecution of Nero began about the middle or latter part of Nov. A.D. 64, at Rome. It ended with the death of Nero, which was on the ninth of June, A.D. 68, for on that day Galba entered Rome and was proclaimed emperor. Here again is 3 + years or 1260 days with sufficient exactness; for the precise time of forty-two months expires about the middle or end of May, and Nero died in the first part of June. . . .[69]

69. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:469. See also J. C. 1. Gieseler, *Textbook of Ecclesiastical History*, trans. by Francis Cunningham, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1836),

> With *frets* such as these before us, how can we doubt what interpretation ought to be put upon the *times* thus designated in these respective passages?[70]

There are those who view the Neronic persecution as lasting but a few months in A.D. 64 – 65. The later deaths of Peter and Paul and the evil role of Nero in early Christian literature, however, militate against such a delimitation. A number of scholars have held to the persecution as lasting until Nero's death.[71]

Conclusion

It is most remarkable that not only in Revelation do we find large patterns of evidences befitting the A.D. 60s era, but also even many smaller details. It surely is no accidental similarity that allows us to

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p. 56; John Rutherford, "Persecution," in *ISBE 42325;* von Mosheim, *History of Christianity* 1:142.

70. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:469.

71. See for example:

T. W. Carron, *The Christian Testimony Throughout the Ages* (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), p. 30.

Henry Cowan, *Landmarks of Church History to the Reformation,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1904), p. 6.

Franz Xavier Funk, *A Manual of Church History,* trans. Luigi Cappadelta, 5th ed. (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1904) 1:40.

Justo L. Gonzalez, The Story *of Christianity,* vol. 1: *Early Church to the* Dawn of *the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 36.

Samuel G. Green, *A Handbook of Church History from the Apostolic Era to the Dawn of the Reformation* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1904), p. 64.

George Gregory, *Dr. Gregory's History of the Christian Church from the Earliest Periods to the Present Time,* ed. Martin Ruter (Cincinnati: Roff and Young, 1832), p. 28.

John Fletcher Hurst, *Short History of the Christian Church (New* York: Harper, 1892), p. 18.

George Johnson, Jerome D. Hannan, and M. Dominica, *The Story of the Church: Her Founding, Miss-ion, and Progress (New* York Benziger, 1947), p. 39.

Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Church History,* 9th cd., trans. John McPherson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1888), p. 77.

William Jones, The *History of the Christian Church from the Birth of Christ to the Eighteenth Century,* 5th cd., vol. 1 (London: William Jones, 1826), p. 163.

Joseph McSorely, *An Outline of the History of the Church by Centuries,* 9th ed. (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1954), p. 22.

Milo Mahan, *A Church History of the First Seven Centuries to the Close of the Sixth General* Council, 3rd ed. (New York: E. and J. B. Young, 1892), p. 26.

Andrew Miller, *Church History from the First to the Twentieth Century,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, [1873] 1964), p. 122.

find not only particular personages (Nero), cultural structures (the Jewish Temple), and historical events (the Neronic Persecution and the Jewish War) that harmonize well with the Neronic era, but even time-frames for these that fill out the picture of the era of which John wrote. It can be no other than in the mid- to late A.D. 60s.

W. Simpson, *An Epitome of the History of the Christian Church* During *the First Three Centuries and of the Reformation in England, 3rd* ed. (Cambridge Macmillan, 1857), p. 67.

David Churchill Somervell, *A Short History of our Religion (New* York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 129.

David D. Van Antwerp, *Church History*, 5th cd., vol. 1 (New York: James Pott, 1884), pp. 27, 42.

B. F. Westcott, *The Two Empires: The Church and the World* (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 32ff.

Edward Backhouse, *Early Church History to the Death of Constantine*, 3rd ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1892), p. 11.

W. D. Killen, *The Ancient Church: Its History, Doctrine, Worship, Constitution, Traced for the First Three Hundred* Years, ed. John Hall (New York Anson D. F. Randolph, 1883), pp. 147ff.

PART IV

ALLEGED DOMITIANIC EVIDENCES EXAMINED

15

INTRODUCTION TO DOMITIANIC EVIDENCES

Despite the wealth of compelling arguments for an early date cited heretofore, late date advocacy persists among the majority of scholars, even to the point of dominance in academic circles. Although in the nineteenth century the evidence cited in defense of a late date for Revelation derived almost solely from external considerations, such is certainly not the situation in the current debate since the early 1900s. [1] Current late date literature vigorously argues from the internal evidence. In order the better to secure the early date argument in terms of the internal evidence, we must address those contrary arguments put forward by late date advocates.

Though there are a variety of approaches to the evidence arrayed by late date advocates, it would appear that the modern case concentrates its focus upon four basic arguments. These arguments are capably summarized by evangelical scholar and late date advocate Leon Morris in his commentary on Revelation. The order of his listing will be followed.

First, what Morris calls "the principal reason for dating the book during" Domitian's reign is that Revelation "contains a number of indications that emperor-worship was practised, and this is thought to have become widespread in Domitian's day."2 Second, "indica-

1. Terry could write in the late 1800s that no "critic of any note has ever claimed that the later date is required by any internal evidence" (Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974], p. 240). Interestingly, Morris's more recent late date commentary hardly even considers the external evidence at all! (Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969], pp. 34ff.). Guthrie places it as his last argument (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. [Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970], p. 956).

2. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 35. See also Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977),

tions that Revelation was written in a time of persecution" accord "muchbetter with Domitian. "3

Third, "the book shows evidence of knowledge of the Nero *redivivw* myth" that "took time to develop and Domitian's reign is about as early as we can expect it."4

Fourth, the "indication is that the churches of Asia Minor seem to have a period of development behind them. This would scarcely have been possible at the time of the Neronic persecution."5

Let us, then, turn our attention to a *seriatim* consideration of the substance of these arguments.

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pp. 32ff. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John,* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1 :xciv-xcv. James Moffatt, *The* Revelation *of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament,* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), pp. 307-316. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), p. ci. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 949-951. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament,* 17th cd., trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), pp. 467-468. William Barclay, The *Revelation of John, 2* vols. Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 1:18.

3. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 36. See also Moffatt, *Revelation,* pp. 317-320 (though his approach is much different, cf. p. 313). Charles, *Revelation* 1 :xciv-xcv. Mounce, *Revelation,* pp. 33-34. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 951-953. Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 467.

4. Morns, *Revelation,* p. 37. See also Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 34. Charles, *Revelation* 1 :xcv-xcvii. Moffatt, *Revelation,* pp. 305-307. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. ci-cii. Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 468. Guthrie, *Introducton,* pp. 953-954.

5. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37. See also Mounce, *Revelation,* pp. 34-35. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. c-ci. Kiimmel, *Introduction,* p. 469. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 954-956.

16

THE ROLE OF EMPEROR WORSHIP

As we saw in our last chapter, Leon Morris considers the argument from the role of emperor worship in Revelation to be "the principal reason" for dating the book during Domitian's reign. Undoubtedly his statement finds widespread concurrence among late date advocates. Morris, Guthrie, Mounce, and others list it as either their first or most conclusive argument. [1] For Moffatt the role of emperor worship in Revelation is virtually conclusive: "When the motive of the Apocalypse is thus found in the pressure upon the Christian conscience exerted by Domitian's emphasis of the imperial cultus, especially as that was felt in Asia Minor, any earlier date for the book becomes almost impossible."[2] He stated quite positively that the emperor worship that could be found no earlier than Domitian was the "peril which formed at once the occasion and the theme of John's Apocalypse."3

Perhaps Charles put the argument as vigorously and ably as possible:

There is no evidence of any kind to prove that the conflict between

1. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament introduction,* 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 949. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 32. See also its prominence in Andre Feuillet, *The* Apocalypse, trans. Thomas E. Crane (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965), p. 91; Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), p. 323; Isbon T. BeckWith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction* (Grand Rapids Baker, [191 7] 1967), p. 201; to name but a few.

2. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament,* vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 317. See also James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 503.

3. Moffatt, Revelation, p. 307.

> Christianity and the imperial cult had reached the pitch of antagonism that is presupposed in the [Revelation] before the closing years of Domitian's reign. In the reign of Vespasian the Christians, as Moffatt . . . writes, "seem to have enjoyed a comparative immunity . . . and our available knowledge of the period renders it unlikely . . . that anything occurred either under him or Titus to call forth language so intense as that of the Apocalypse." Moreover, Vespasian did not take his claims to divinity seriously. But Domitian insisted on the public recognition of these claims, and in the last year of his reign he began to persecute the Church in the capital of the Empire. . . . Compliance with the claims of the imperial cult was made the test of loyalty to the Empire. In the earlier days, Christians had been persecuted for specific crimes, such as anarchy, atheism, immorality, etc. But in the latter days of Domitian the confession of the name of Christ (cf. [Rev.] 2:3, 13; 3:8; 12:11; 20:4) was tantamount to a refusal to accede to the Emperor's claims to divinity, and thereby entailed the penalty of death (13: 15).4

Torrey scorns such argumentation when he states regarding the verses found in Revelation 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4: "Now these, together with the rest of chapter 13, are the *only* allusions to the imperial cult which are to be found in Revelation, and they all refer definitely to the Beast of 13:18. If the background of the reign of Domitian is to be found at all in the book, it must be sought elsewhere."5 With Torrey we are compelled to agree. Let us then consider the validity of the late date argumentation on this matter, all the while keeping in mind the previously established arguments for Revelation's early date. The cracks in the emperor cult argument will be exposed in the light of three very basic considerations.

The Difficulty of Dating the Emperor Cult

Initially it would seem that the arguments based on the emperor cult as presented above should serve as valuable clues to the date of Revelation. Unfortunately, despite the confidence with which the watermark of the emperor cult on the pages of Revelation is presented, there are fundamentally erroneous assumptions involved that

4. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John,* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh T. &T. Clark, 1920) 1 :xciv-xcv.

5. Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 68.

undermine the arguments. For the emperor cult to serve as a dating indicator capable of overthrowing the wealth of early date evidence rehearsed heretofore, it must be demonstrated rather decisively that the cult as presented in Revelation "is a post-Neronian phenomenon that is "almost impossible" in the Neronian era.

It is more than a little interesting that some of the leading exponents of this evidence — *the* leading late date evidence — are not as fully persuaded themselves of the evidential value of the cult as one would like, if their evidence is to be compelling proof. Morris, who terms this evidence "the principal reason" for a Domitianic date, is a case in point. He at first briefly presents the evidence for his "principal reason" for the Domitianic date. He then concludes by stating "on the score of emperor-worship Domitian's reign is the most probable by far." But he seems to offer reason for hesitation: "But dating this accurately is more difficult. Thus Julius Caesar had been worshiped as a god during his lifetime, and, while Augustus was more cautious, there were temples in his honor in some of the provinces. . . . It is true that, from the time of Nero on, the cult tended to grow in some areas and it is barely possible that the references in Revelation could be understood of some period under or after Nero."[6]

Despite his own arguments in regard to the emperor cult, and despite the fact it serves as his first argument for a Domitianic dating of Revelation, Guthrie's hesitation is harmonious with Morris's, and for the same reasons: "No knowledge of any rescript or edict has survived from the first century which enforced emperor worship. . . . [A]lthough the emperor worship presupposed in the Apocalypse would well suit the later period of Domitian's reign, there is no conclusive evidence that it could not have occurred earlier."7 Even as vigorous and as liberal a late date proponent as Moffatt speaks of the cult evidence as "*almost* impossible" under Nero.[8] As Robinson observes "the growth of the imperial cultus is again something which it is almost impossible to date with confidence."[9]

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6. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 35.
7. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 950-951.
8. Moffatt, Revelation, p. 317. Emphasis mine.
9. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 236.

The Pre-Neronian History of the Emperor Cult

We should not only notice the slight hesitancy regarding the emperor cult in these scholars, but also the rationale for such: (1) Emperor worship is traceable as far back as Julius Caesar, almost a century before Nero's death. (2) Formal temples erected for the worship of the emperor are known to exist as far back as Augustus's reign (c. 29 B.C.).[10] (3) The method for the enforcement of emperor worship under Domitian is unknown, despite the claims that only beginning with Domitian could the slaying of non-participants have existed (as per the Revelation evidence).'[11] (4) The first *official* imperial evidence of the enforcement of emperor worship is after both Nero and Domitian, in the reign of Trajan. These are serious problems besetting any confident employment of emperor worship in the argument. Especially are these problematic in light of the quite precise chronological observations supportive of the early date in Revelation 17 (the enumeration of the "kings") and the existence of the Temple, which is known to have perished in A.D. 70. The emperor cult argument is slippery, as we shall see. At this juncture a brief survey of the history of the emperor cult will prove helpful in illustration of the fact that Revelation's evidence is not incompatible with a pre-Domitianic date.[12]

Julius

Apparently, Julius Caesar learned from Cleopatra "the political advantage of the deifications of royalty – the Pharaohs of Egypt having been accepted by their subjects as incarnate deities."'3 Earlier

10. Edward C. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets and the Prophetic Apocalypse* (London: Macmillan, 1900), p. 122.

11. As will be noted in the next major section, there is a great deal more substantial evidence for a Neronic persecution of Christianity than for a Domitianic.

12. For fuller discussion of the development of the imperial cult see the following Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Putnam's, 1908) 1:2:9. B. W. Henderson, *The Life* and *Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 347ff., 434ff. Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution of the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1906] 1980), pp. 94ff. Kenneth Scott, "The Identification of Augustus with Romulus-Quinnus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association %82-105*. Lily Ros Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, Corm.: American Philological Association, 1931), *passim*. Kurt Aland, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Threshold of the Reformation*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Philadelphia Fortress, 1985), pp. 18-22.

13. Arthur Weigall, Nero: *Emperor of Rome* (London: Butterworth, 1933), p. 110.

in Roman history Roman generals had been worshiped in their lifetime by "the effusive Oriental" and "the excitable Greek," but Roman countrymen "laughed and left such follies to the conquered races."[14] It was with "Julius Caesar [that] there came a change"[15] in this regard. Caesar's "statue was placed in the temple of Quinnus (deified Romulus), another near those of the kings of Rome, and yet another showed him with a globe beneath his feet; his chariot was set up opposite the temple of Juppiter *[sic].* As a *triumphator* he was granted the right to a gilded chair."[16] Indeed, Caesar was granted the title "Juppiter Julius."[17]

Beckwith notes that "Julius Caesar boldly claimed divine honor."[18] In fact, he was described in an inscription at Ephesus (one of the cities to which Revelation is addressed) as "god manifest and common saviour of the life of man"[19] and "To the goddess Roma and the divine Julius."[20] Suetonius notes in this regard that "he allowed honours to be bestowed on him which were too great for mortal man: . . . temples, altars, and statues beside those of the gods; a special priest, an additional college of the Superci, and the calling of one of the months by his name."[21]

After Julius's death the Roman Senate "decreed his *consecratio*, apotheosis, and the appearance of a comet was regarded as a sign of his reception into the company of the superior divinities."[22] From that time forth he began to be called "*Divus Iulius*."[23] In addition, a formal cult of *Divus Iulius* was established[24] and "an altar to him was erected in the forum." Ratton notes that "his statue was put up in the

14. B. W. Henderson, *Five Roman* Emperors (Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 27.
15. *Ibid.*
16. H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero,* 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963), p. 152.
17. *Ibid.,* p. 152. See also M. Cary, *A History of Rome Down to the Reign of Constantine,* 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1967), p. 421. J. L. Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R.& T. Washbourne, 1912), p. 48. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 47:18:33.
18. Beckwith, *Apocalypse,* p. 198.
19. Scullard, *Gracchi to* Nero, p. 152.
20. Beckwith, *Apocalypse,* p. 199.
21. Suetonius, *Julius* 76.
22. Beckwith, *Apocalypse,* p. 198. See Cicero, *Philippi 2:110.* Suetonius, *Julius 38.* Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 44:6:4. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 1:15.
23. Cicero, *Philippi 2:110.* Suetonius, *Divus Iulius.*
24. Scullard, *Gracchi to Nero,* p. 152.

temple of Quirinius, with the inscription 'To the invincible God.' "25 Suetonius records for us the actions of Lucius Antonius: "Some write that three hundred men of both orders were selected from the prisoners of war and sacrificed on the Ides of March like so many victims at the altar raised to the Deified Julius."[26] Here in Suetonius we find at least this one occurrence of the slaying of men as altar victims for the deified Caesar.

Several men set up a twenty foot high marble column inscribed with "To the Father of his Country. " Suetonius notes that "at the foot of this they continued for a long time to sacrifice, make vows, and settle some of their disputes by an oath in the name of Caesar."[27] He was said to have been accepted as a god not only by a formal decree of the Senate, "but also in the conviction of the common people."[28] Clearly emperor worship was well under way in Julius Caesar's day.

Augustus

Although Augustus forbade divine honors to himself in Rome,*[29] Tacitus and Suetonius record the fact that he sanctioned his worship and the erection of altars elsewhere.[30]

> As early as 29 B.C. he allowed the diets of Asia and Bithynia to erect temples and shew divine honour to him at their places of assembly, Pergamus and Nicomedia. The high priest of the new temple was appointed year by year, and he was the most eminent dignitary in the province.[31]

Beckwith notes that on his death the Senate voted Augustus *consecration* and that a temple was erected in the Palatine area of Rome. Furthermore, "his worship spread rapidly in both the Asian and

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25. Ratton, *Apocalypse*, p. 48. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History 47:18:33.*

26. Suetonius, *Augustus* 15.

27. Suetonius, *Julius 85.*

28. Ibid. 88.

29. He disdained the title "*Dominius*" ("Lord") because he preferred to be known as the governor of free men rather than the master of slaves; Suetonius, *Augustus* 53.

30. Suetonius, *Augustus 52-53;* Tacitus, *Annals 1:10.* Cp. BeckWith, *Apocalypse*, p. 199. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors,* pp. 27ff. Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John,* 3rd cd., trans. Henry E. Jacobs (New York Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), p. 51. Ratton, *Apocalypse*, p. 48.

31. Selwyn, *Christian Prophets,* pp. 122-123.

western provinces, so that Philo could say, that everywhere honors were decreed to him equal to those of the Olympian gods. "32

> In one respect Octavian had long been unique: since 42 B.C. and the consecrations of Divus Julius he had been the son of a god, "Divi filius." After Actium his birthday was celebrated as a public holiday; libations were poured in his honour at public and private banquets; from 29 B.C. his name was added to those of the gods in hymns; two years later he received the title of Augustus; his Genius, perhaps in 12 B. C., was inserted in official oaths between the names of Juppiter and the Di Penates; in A.D. 13 an altar was dedicated by Tiberius in Rome to the Numen Augusti.[33]

Accordingly Suetonius noted of the emperor Claudius that he used as "his most sacred and frequent oath 'By Augustus.' "34

Interestingly, late date advocate Moffatt has an excellent summary of the cult as it existed in focus on Augustus:

> Since the days of Augustus, the emperor had been viewed as the guardian and *genius* of the empire, responsible for its welfare and consequently worthy of its veneration. It was a convenient method of concentrating and expressing loyalty, to acknowledge him as entitled to the prestige of a certain sanctity, even during his lifetime. . . . Its political convenience, however, lent it increasing momentum. Gradually, on the worship of the *Lares Augusti* in Italy and the capital . . . and on the association of the imperial cultus with that of *dea Roma* (to whom a temple had been erected at Smyrna as far back as 195 B.C.), the new canonisation rose to its height, never jealous of local cults, but thriving by means of its adaptability to the religious syncretism of the age. It was the religious sanction of the new imperialism. It had temples, sacrifices, choirs (as at Smyrna), and even a priesthood (the "*Socales Augustales*") of its own.
>
> For obvious reasons the cult flourished luxuriantly in the provinces, particularly in Asia Minor, where the emperor was often regarded as an incarnation of the local god or named before him. . . . The cultus, attaching itself like mistletoe to institutions and local rites alike, shot up profusely; polytheism found little trouble in admitting the emperor to a place beside the gods, and occasionally, as in the case of Augustus and Apollo, or of Domitian and Zeus, "the emperor

32. Beckwith, *Apocalypse*, p. 199.
33. Scullard, *Gracchi to Nero,* p. 242.
34. *Claudius,* 11.

> was represented as the deity incarnate in human form." . . . At Thera, for example, a pagan altar has been found which was dedicated "to the almighty Caesar, the son of God." . . . This *divi filius* title was one of the most common and least conventional of what John called *blasphemias onomata.*[35]

Archaeologists have in their possession a decree of the Synod of the Province of Asia dated about 9 B.C. that has been preserved in a letter of the proconsul to the cities of Asia.[36] The decree commends the celebration of "the natal day of the most divine Caesar [Augustus]."[37] This document notes very clearly that the emperor Augustus was deemed to be the cause of Rome's glorious condition:

> [W]hether the natal day of the most divine Caesar [Augustus] is to be observed most for the joy of it or for the profit of it – a day which one might justly regard as equivalent to the beginning of all things, equivalent, I say, if not in reality, at any rate in the benefits it has brought, seeing that there was nothing ruinous or that had fallen into a miserable appearance that he has not restored. He has given another aspect to the universe, which was only tm ready to perish, had not Caesar – a blessing to the whole of mankind – been born. For which reason each individual may justly look upon this day as the beginnings of his own life and physical being, because there can be no more of the feeling that life is a burden, now that he has been born. . . .
>
> Resolved by the Greeks of the province of Asia, on the proposal of the High-priest Apollonius. . . : Whereas the Providence which orders the whole of human life has shown a special concern and zeal and conferred upon life its most perfect ornament by bestowing Augustus, whom it fitted for his beneficent work among mankind by filling him with virtue, sending him as a Savior, for us and for those who come after us, one who should cause wars to cease, who should set all things in fair order, and whereas Caesar, when he appeared, made the hopes of those who forecast a better future [look poor compared with the reality], in that he not only surpassed all previous benefactors, but left no chance for future ones to go beyond him, and the glad tidings

35. Moffatt, *Revelation,* pp. 307-309. Selwyn offers additional helpful insights into the role of the Asiarch and Ashiarchess (the Asiarch's wife) in promoting the imperial cult, noting that these would eventually bring Christians "face to face with the imperial cultus" (*Christian Prophets,* p. 124).

36. Howard Clark Kee, *The Origins of Christianity: Sources and Documents* (Englewood, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 74-76.

37. Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 76.

> [Greek, *euangelia*] which by his means went forth into the world took its rise in the birthday of the God. . . .[38]

It should not surprise us that "in the first century of the Christian Era all the emperors claim this supreme achievement [i.e., divinity] for themselves," nor that "the emperors after Augustus especially promoted the cult of the emperor."[39] As a matter of fact, "the practice in its worst form, that is the worship of the living emperor, had been known in Asia as early as the reign of Augustus."[40]

Tiberius

In response to just this matter Christ's remarks during the reign of Tiberius regarding the tribute money must be understood (Matt. 22: 15-22; Mark 12: 13-17; Luke 20:20-26). Here Christ taught that lovers of the true God should "render unto God" those things that are God's (i.e., worship), and only "render unto Caesar" those things that are rightfully his (i.e., taxes). This clearly is a not-so-subtle exposure of the error of emperor worship. Indeed, as Deissmann notes, this is a tacit protest against emperor worship under Tiberius (A.D. 14-37).[41] History records that at Tiberius's death "eleven cities of Asia struggled for the honour of erecting a temple to his memory."[42] The Senate finally awarded the temple to Smyrna,[43] one of the seven cities to which one of the Seven Letters in Revelation was written.

Caligula

What need we say of Caligula? Caligula was clearly a madman possessed with the conviction of his own deity, for he "put the head of his own statue upon one of the Olympian Jupiter, and had himself saluted as Jupiter Latiaris, erecting a temple to himself, with special priests and sacrifices."[44] Josephus records for posterity the deluded pretensions of Caligula:

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38. *Ibid.*
39. Aland, *History of Christianity* 1:18, 19.
40. Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919), p. 84.
41. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East (New* York 1922), p. 252.
42. Workman, *Persecution,* pp. 40ff.
43. Selwyn, *Christian Prophets,* p. 123.
44. Düsterdieck, *Revelation,* p. 51. See Suetonius, Caligula21.

> Now, one of these ambassadors from the people of Alexandria was Apion, who uttered many blasphemies against the Jews; and, among other things that he said, he charged them with neglecting the honours that belonged to Caesar; for that while all who were subject to the Roman empire built altars and temples to Caius, and in other regards universally received him as they received the gods, these Jews alone thought it a dishonourable thing for them to erect statues in honour of him, as well as to swear by his name.[45]

His notorious plan to have his image erected in the Temple at Jerusalem and the providential prevention of it is well-known, thanks to Josephus.[46]

Claudius

Suetonius and Tacitus both record the up and down position of Claudius as a god: he was voted a god upon his death only to have his enrollment among the gods annulled by Nero but later restored by Vespasian.47 Even during his life a temple was erected to him at Colchester.[48]

Clearly then, the emperor cult had a prominent role in the political and social life of the Roman empire from at least the times of Augustus – well before Domitian, and even before Nero.[49] In fact, "the student of the struggle of contending religions in the early Roman Empire cannot neglect the history of the State cult, even if he feels disposed to slight it as no true example of religion. The seer of Patmos did not so misapprehend its force."5° Even late date advocates note that "the blasphemous title of *divus*, assumed by the emperors since Octavian (Augustus = *sebastos*) as a semi-sacred title, implied superhuman claims that shocked the pious feelings of Jews and Christians alike. So did θεος and θεοῦ υἱός that, as the inscriptions prove, were freely applied to the emperors, from Augustus

45, *Antiquities 18:8:1. See* also Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:5-6.

46. Antiquities 18:8:2.

47. Suetonius, *Claudius 45; Nero 9; 33;* Tacitus, *Annals* 12:69.

48. Workman, *Persecution,* p. 40.

49. Helpful in pointing out the existence of emperor worship and the role of emperors in various cults during the reigns of Caligula, Claudius, and Nero is E. Mary Smallwood, cd., *Documents Illustratng the Principates of Gaius Claudus and Nero* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), entries #124-163, pp. 48-53.

50. B. W. Henderson, *The Study of Roman History*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1921), p. 102.

onwards ."51

Let us turn now to a consideration of the matter from the perspective of Nero's reign in particular.

The Evidence of the Emperor Cult in Nero's Reign

Nero was surely the most evil Roman emperor of the first century A. D., excelling both Caligula and Domitian in notoriety. He was also jealously vain in his proud appreciation of his own artistic talents.[52] Surely his character would compel him to take advantage of the emperor cult to feed his debased nature and vain pretensions. Although there are some who doubt his use of the emperor cult,[53] there is significant evidence of not only Nero's endorsement of it, but even intimations that it may have been a factor (one of several) behind both the persecution of Christians in Rome in A.D. 64 and the overthrow of Israel in the Jewish War.

Nero was particularly infatuated with Apollo; he even claimed "the title 'Son of Apollos,' and appeared ostentatiously in this role."5[4] Seneca, one of young Nero's tutors and a powerful influence in the era of Nero's reign designated the *Quinquennium Neronis*,[55] convinced Nero that he was destined to become the very revelation of Augustus and of Apollo.[56] Speaking as Apollo, Seneca praised Nero:

> He is like me in much, in form and appearance, in his poetry and singing and playing. And as the red of morning drives away dark night, as neither haze nor mist endure before the sun's rays, as everything becomes bright when my chariot appears, so it is when Nero ascends the throne. His golden locks, his fair countenance, shine like the sun as it breaks through the clouds. Strife, injustice and envy collapse before him. He restores to the world the golden age. 57

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51. Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. *429.*

52. Miriam T. Griffin, Nero: *The End of a Dynasty (New* Haven: Yale, 1984), chaps. 9 and 10.

53. E.g., *ibid.*, pp. 215ff.

54. Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era: The World of the Bible from 500 B.C. to A.D. 100,* trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia Fortress, 1968), p. 206.

55. The Emperor Trajan even noted that this era was one superior to any other governmental era. For an able and enlightening discussion of Seneea's influence on Nero and the nature of these five auspicious years, see Henderson, *Life and Prim"pate,* chap. 3.

56. Seneca, On *Clemency* 1:1 :6; *Apocolocyntosis (Pumpkinification) 415-35.*

57. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars: Historical Sketches*, 3rd ed., trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), p. 52.

Suetonius remarks of Nero that "since he was acclaimed as the equal of Apollo in music and of the Sun in driving a chariot, he had planned to emulate the exploits of Hercules as well."[58] An inscription from Athens speaks of him as: "All powerful Nero Caesar Sebastos, a new Apollo."[59] Nero's portrait appears on coins as Apollo playing the lyre.[60] He appears with his head radiating the light of the sun on copper coins struck in Rome and at Lugdunum: one type has Genius sacrificing over an altar on the reverse side; another has Apollo Citharoedus on the reverse.[61] As Reicke notes of Nero's Apollo fascination: "All this was more than pomp and show: Nero strove with deadly seriousness to play the role of Augustus and Apollo politically, the former primarily from 54 to 61, the latter from 62 to 68."[62]

As early in his reign as 55 the Senate erected a statue of Nero "on divine scale in the Temple of Mars at the Forum Augusti . . . , thus introducing the cult into the city of Rome."[63] The statue was the same size as that of Mars in Mars's own Temple."[64] That Nero actually was worshiped is evident from inscriptions found in Ephesus in which he is called "Almighty God" and "Saviour."[65] Reference to Nero as "God and Savior" is found in an inscription at Salamis, Cyprus.[66] In fact, "as his megalomania increased, the tendency to worship him as ruler of the world became stronger, and in Rome his features appeared on the colossus of the Sun near the Golden House, while his head was represented on the coinage with a radiate crown. Members of the imperial house also began to receive unheard of honours: . . . Nero deified his child by Poppaea and Poppaea herself after their deaths. All this was far removed from the modest attitude

58. Suetonius, Nero 53.

59. Smallwood, *Documents*, p. 52 (entry #145).

60. C. H. V. Sutherland, Coinage *in Roman Imperial Policy, 31 B.C. – A.D. 68 (1950)*, p. 170, plate 16:6. See also Henderson, Nero, p. 394. Michael Grant, *Roman Imperial Money* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1954) and Grant, *Roman History from Coins: Some Uses of the Imperial Coinage to the Historian* (London: Cambridge, 1958).

61. Smallwood, *Documents*, p. 52 (entries #143-144). A. Momigliano, *The Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 10: The Augustan Empire, 44 B.C. – A.D. 70* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 493.

62. Reicke, New *Testament Era*, p. 241.

63. *Ibid.* See Tacitus, *Annals* 13:81.

64. Robinson, *Redating*, p. 236.

65. Ratton, *Apocalypse*, p. 48.

66. Smallwood, *Documents*, p. 142 (entry #142).

of Augustus."[67] Indeed, of the imperial development of the emperor cult it should be noted that "Caligula and Nero, however, abandoned all reserve. Caligula was pictured on coins with the halo of the sun god Helios, and Nero was represented as Apollo."[68] The archaeological record evidences that "the emperors, around whose heads, from the days of Nero onwards, had gilded darting rays in token of their divine solar ancestry."[69] Nero clearly "demanded divine honors while . . . still alive."[70]

In A.D. 66 Tiridates, King of Armenia, approached Nero in devout and reverential worship, as recorded by Dio Cassius:

> Indeed, the proceedings of the conference were not limited to mere conversations, but a lofty platform had been erected on which were set images of Nero, and in the presence of the Armenians, Parthians, and Romans Tiridates approached and paid them reverence; then, after sacrificing to them and calling them by laudatory names, he took off the diadem from his head and set it upon them. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> Tiridates publicly fell before Nero seated upon the rostra in the Forum: "Master, I am the descendant of Arsaces, brother of the kings Vologaesus and Pacorus, and thy slave. And I have come to thee, my god, to worship thee as I do Mithras. The destiny thou spinnest for me shall be mine; for thou art my Fortune and my Fate."[71]

Dio notes also the fate of one senator who did not appreciate Nero's "divine" musical abilities: "Thrasaea was executed because he failed to appear regularly in the senate, . . . and because he never would listen to the emperor's singing and lyre-playing, nor sacrifice to Nero's Divine Voice as did the rest."[72]

Stauffer points out the beginning of a new theology of the emperor cult that was born under Nero:

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67. Scullard, *Gracchi to Nero,* p. 371. See also Henderson *Five Roman Emperors,* p. 29.

68. Eduard Lohse, *The New Testament Environment,* trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), p. 220. See also Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity (New* York Atheneum, 1979), pp. 6ff.

69. Workman, *Persecution,* p. 40. See also *Cambridge Ancient History 10493.*

70. Joseph Ward Swain, *The Harper History of Civilization,* vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1958), p. 229.

71. Roman *History* 62:5:2.

72. Roman History 62:26:3.

Who is the heavenly saviour whose coming the peoples have awaited? The emperor!

The official expression of this political philosophy is the classical coin. On the obverse of the coin we see the portrait of the ruler, decorated with the marks and emblems of deity, and framed in titles of divine dignity. For the ruler is the god who had become man. The reverse of the coin usually depicts the most symbolically potent event in the life of the ruler, his *advent*. . . . [I]t was in the age of the emperors that the political advent philosophy reached its heyday. The first to have the word ADVENTUS inscribed on the coins was Nero. A Corinthian coin of Nero's reign, from the year 67, has on the obverse the type of the emperor in divine nakedness, adorned only with the laurel wreath of Apollo, and on the reverse the flagship with the imperial standard and above it the inscription ADVENTUS AUGUSTI, the Arrival of the August One. The divine Apollo once came by sea to the Greek mainland. The Roman emperor now makes his entry into Greece by sea, in order that he may be worshiped as Apollo incarnate.[73]

Thus, of Paul's first Roman imprisonment, it can be noted that:

History has few stranger contrasts than when it shows us Paul preaching Christ under the walls of Nero's palace. Thenceforward, there were but two religions in the Roman world: the worship of the Emperor and the worship of the Saviour. The old superstitions had been long worn out; they had lost all hold on educated minds. There remained to civilised heathen no other worship possible but the worship of power; and the incarnation of power which they chose was, very naturally, the Sovereign of the world. This, then, was the ultimate result of the noble intuitions of Plato, the methodical reasonings of Aristotle, the pure morality of Socrates. All had failed, for want of external sanction and authority. The residuum they left was the philosophy of Epicurus, and the religion of Nerolatry. But a new doctrine was already taught in the Forum, and believed even on the Palatine. Over against the altars of Nero and Poppaea, the voice of a prisoner was daily heard, and daily woke in groveling souls the consciousness of their divine destiny.[74]

In A.D. 67 Nero went to Greece where he remained for more

73. Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars*, p. 38.

74. W. J. Coneybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, vol. 2* (New York: Scribners, 1894), pp. 434-435.

than a year performing as a musician and an actor in the four Grecian festivals, the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian.[75] Soon thereafter "Nero was actually deified by the Greeks as 'Zeus, Our Liberator.' On the altar of Zeus in the chief temple of the city they inscribed the words 'to Zeus, our Liberator' namely Nero, for ever and ever; in the temple of Apollo they set up his statue; and they called him 'The new Sun, illuminating the Hellenes,' and 'the one and only lover of the Greeks of all time.' "[76] When Nero returned to Rome, he returned to the triumphant praise of the city as he entered the palace and Apollo's temple on the Palatine. 77 Dio records the scene thus:

> The city was all decked with garlands, was ablaze with lights and reeking with incense, and the whole population, the senators themselves most of all, kept shouting in chorus: "Hail, Olympian Victor! Hail, Pythian Victor! Augustus! Augustus! Hail to Nero, our Hercules! Hail to Nero, our Apollo! The only Victor of the Grand Tour, the only one from the beginning of time! Augustus! Augustus! O, Divine Voice! Blessed are they that hear thee."[78]

After Nero's death, the emperor Vitellius even offered sacrifices to the spirit of the deceased Nero. This matter was so serious that Vespasian had to make the effort to check this Nero cult.[79]

Later descriptions of Nero portray his lust for deity. Book 5 of the Sibylline Oracles, is a Jewish composition written for the most part sometime after A.D. 80.[80] In this book of the Oracles "the evil of Nero has the same three dimensions as the evil of Rome: he is morally evil, he was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem (vs. 150), since the Jewish war began in his reign, and he claimed to be God."[81]

The mid-second century Christian pseudepigraphic work Ascen-

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75. Henderson, *Life and Principate*, pp. 381ff.

76. Weigall, Nero, p. 276. Weigall has noted that a memorial stone found at Kardiza in 1888 contained Nero's declaratory speech to which the Greeks responded with accolades of his divinity. A fuller text of the Greek response to Nero's speech can be found in Henderson, *Life* and *Principate*, p. 391.

77. Henderson, Nero, p, 394.

78. Dio Cassius, Rom *History* 62:20:5.

79. *ibid.* 65:4. *See* Weigall, Nero, pp. 299ff.

80. J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, *2* vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:390.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 395, notes y and b2.

sion of Isaiah "foretells" Beliar's (i.e., Nero's)** reign: "Beliar . . . shall descend . . . in the form of a man, a lawless king, a slayer of his mother, who . . . will persecute the plant which the Twelve Apostles of the Beloved have planted . . . He will act and speak in the name of the Beloved and say 'I am God and before me there has been none else.' And all the people in the world will believe in him, and will sacrifice to him. "[83]

Emperor Worship and the Neronian Persecution

In Revelation 13 (and in scattered verses elsewhere in Revelation) there is apocalyptic imagery that, on the basis of the above evidence, is easily applicable to the era of Nero. Revelation 13: lb-8 reads:

> And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, every one whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

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82. Beliar here is almost universally recognized to be Nero. See J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation.* Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), p. 218. George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome* in *the First Century* (London: Longman's, Green, 1913), p. 48.

83. Ascension of Isaiah 4 1ff.

As demonstrated heretofore, the Beast is representative of imperial Rome, the seven heads being the first seven emperors .84 We have also argued that the 42 month "war against the saints" represented the persecution of Christians by the beast Nero from A.D. 64 to 68.[85] The role of the wounded head" will be treated in a major section yet to come.[86] At this juncture we will set forth a brief demonstration of the relationship of the emperor cult to the Neronian persecution (in the next chapter we will deal more in depth with the nature and extent of the Neronian persecution).

Clarifying the Issue

We note here at the outset that a *formal*, legal relationship of emperor worship to the Neronian persecution is not absolutely required by the prophetic message contained in Revelation. Two considerations lead us to this statement. In the first place, even upon purely secular (i.e., naturalistic, anti-prophetic) presuppositions the ideas embodied in Revelation 13 can be perceived as subtly lurking behind the persecution of Nero. For the very existence of the emperor cult and its employment by Nero himself surely would suggest to the mind even of a mere non-inspired enthusiast both the religious incompatibility of the Christian faith in regard to the divine pretensions of the emperor, as well as the inexorable drift to deadly confrontation. After all, at an earlier date (c. A.D. 40-41) had not Caligula madly proposed the erection of his image in the Temple of Jerusalem to the bitter distress and excited consternation of the Jews – and to the very brink of war? Thus, whether or not the emperor Nero formally and legally demanded "worship or die," the inevitable tendency of the emperor cult, when coupled with the autocratic power of the mad emperor Nero, must necessarily result in just such an explosive confrontation. The Christian "man on the street" must have feared just such a potential under Nero's nefarious reign.

In the second place, it could be that the prophecy of Revelation 13 speaks of the underlying *philosophical* and *spiritual* issues engaged, rather than the external publicly advertised and judicially sanctioned ones. That is, Revelation 13 could very well provide a graphic *spiritual* elucidation of the fundamental potentialities lurking behind the cruel

84. See Chap. 10.
85. See Chaps. 14 and 17.
86. See Chap. 18.

imperial developments under Nero, rather than any specific legal datum relative to Christianity. Nevertheless, there is evidence pointing to an actual confrontation that meets the expectations of the passage even when literally interpreted.

Domitian and the Emperor Cult

What is more – and this is a crucial point – it should not be a forgone conclusion that the emperor cult played a role even in the later (alleged) Flavian persecution under Domitian. "Domitian's predilection for being styled *dominus et deus nester,* 'our Lord and God', stimulated a satirical response in many of his subjects, but would have been regarded as plain blasphemy by Christians, for whom there was 'one God, the Father, . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 8:6). But there is no record that this precipitated a clash between him and the Christians ."[ys,]

Henderson views the material of Revelation differently, but in a way fully capable of a Neronic interpretation:

> The work is full of allusions to a persecution of the Christians as Christians, and especially for refusing to "worship the Beast" (i.e., in this connection the Emperor) = dissenters from Caesar-worship. . . . The great crime is "Caesar-worship." This of course suits Domitian. But *from other evidence* it suits Nero as well – when the Christians suffered as Christians. . . . Caesar-worship, e.g. at Pergamum, is just as prominent to a local writer under Nero as later.[88]

Historian Philip Schaff comments that "the unmistakable allusions to imperial persecutions apply much better to Nero than to Domitian. "8[9] Even late date advocate Ramsay admits that the statements drawn from Revelation as evidence of the Domitianic persecution are "entirely uncorroborated: not even indirect evidence supports them. . . . We are reduced to mere general presumptions and estimates of probabilities. . . . This is the one contemporary account that has been preserved of the Flavian procedure."[90] To which

87. F. F. Bruce, New *Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), p. 412.

88. Henderson, *Nero,* p. 440.

89. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian* Church, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:428. More will be said on this matter of the extent and gravity of the persecution in Chap. 17.

90. William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to Sewn Churches* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1904] 1963), p. 99.

comment Robinson retorts: "If that is *not* contemporary, we have nothing."[91] (We will provide more on the persecution motif in Revelation in the next chapter.)

Indeed, it is not until Trajan, the second emperor after Domitian, that hard evidence supportive of a persecution based upon the legal enforcement of the emperor cult upon Christians can be found.[92] This is contained in the famous correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan regarding the proper handling of Christianity in Bithynia, Asia Minor, in about A.D. 11393 – over a decade later than and two emperors after Domitian. The significance of this evidence is that by Traj an's day "it is treated as a stock test of loyalty."[94]

The dogmatism necessary for supporting a late date for Revelation on this matter is without foundation. Peake's reserve, as a capable late date advocate, should be noted and applauded: He understands Domitian's demand for emperor worship from Christians as a cause of the persecution as merely "possible."[95] Robinson notes that "while the evidence from the imperial cultus does not rule out a Domitianic dating, it does not establish it either."[96]

Nero and the Emperor Cult

But apart from these matters, there is slight documentary evidence that suggests that the Neronic persecution was related at least in part to the imperial cult. Tacitus records the rationale for the justification of the persecution.[97] He notes that Nero turned to the Christians in a desperate search for a scapegoat in order to turn suspicions for the burning of Rome from himself He chose them because Christians, as such, were "detested" by the populace. Sue-

91. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 237 n. 86.

92. *Ibid.,* p. 236. Moyer notes that "these letters are the earliest account of Christians to be given by pagan writers" (Elgin S. Moyer, *Who Was Who in Church History* [Chicago: Moody, 1962], p. 335). This correspondence antedates the writings of Tacitus and Suetonius.

93. Pliny, *Epistles* 10:96. Fuller reference to the significance of this correspondence will be made in the next chapter of our inquiry.

94. Robinson, *Redating,* p. 236. See also Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Times* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), p. 331.

95. Peake, *Revelation,* p. 121.

96. Robinson, *Redating,* pp. 237-238.

97. *Annals* 15:44.

tonius records merely that "punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. "[98] Suetonius does not mention the fire; but, he does mention the hatred heaped upon Christians *qua* Christians, as a distinct "class" (Latin: "genus"). Of the charges against the Christians, Tacitus further observes that "those who first confessed were hurried to the trial, and then, on their showing, an immense number was involved in the same fate, *not so much on the charge of incendiaries as from hatred of the human race*" (emphasis mine) .[99] Nero's cruelty in this episode caused the revulsion of even the gladiatorially de-sensitized Remans. They felt of the torment of the Christians "that they were sacrificed not on the altar of public interest, but to satisfy the cruelty of one man. " [100]

We must carefully note that the punishment was exclusively directed against Christians as such – as a *genus*. Clearly Christians were punished as Christians, unlike the situation with Domitian. Furthermore, the punishment was due to their "mischievous superstition" and alleged "hatred (odium) of the human race. " [101] Henderson suggests that the role of the emperor cult in the Neronian spectacle is preserved in the emperor worship sections of Revelation: "The great crime is 'Caesar-worship.' This of course suits Domitian. But *from the other evidence* it suits Nero as well – when the Christians suffered as Christians. The Christian writer [i.e., John] interprets the 'Odium' of Tacitus, etc." [102] As earlier in the history of the Roman Republic with the Bacchanalian Conspiracy, [103] the government could punish "superstitions" that implied a threat to the security and peace of Rome. Culturally the peace of the Roman Empire (i.e., *pax Romana*) *was* supposedly related to the blessing of the emperor. [104] To refuse his worship would be regarded as an insurrectionist contempt

98. *Nero* 16.

99. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

100, *Ibid.*

101. See the capable analysis of contrary views (i.e., that other than Christians were involved) in Henderson, *Life and Principate*, pp. 445ff.

102. *Ibid.*, p. 442.

103. See Livy's account of this conspiracy in Livy, *History of Rome* 39:8. See Josephus's account in *Antiquities 14:10:8.* Cp. Henderson, *Nero*, p. 348; and W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 109, 276.

104. As Sweet has noted in this regard: "Gratitude to Augustus for bringing peace after decades of civil war made his cult inevitable" (*Revelation*, p. 25). See Philo of Alexandria, *Embassy to Gaius* (in Kee, *Origins of Christianity*, p. 48), and the fragment *Letter of the Proconsul to the Cities of Asia* (in *ibid.*, p. 76).

for Roman rule that would threaten social and political upheaval in the empire, an empire that had brought peace, stability, and prosperity to all those living in the Mediterranean world. To refuse the emperor cult would be tantamount to a "hatred of the human race."

One legal pillar that secured this peace was Augustus's Law of Associations that prohibited any association that did not seek state sanction. By refusing to acknowledge the divinity of the *Genius* of the emperor, Christians were suspect. At this point some historical background as to the political relationship of Israel to Rome will prove helpful in countering a potential objection that might arise, i.e., "How did Israel co-exist with Rome?" It is most interesting that since the times of Julius Caesar Israel had benefited from certain special privileges from Rome that were not allowed to other of its subjects. 105 For instance, Jerusalem's walls, which were destroyed by Pompey, were allowed by Julius in his "league of mutual assistance" to be rebuilt by Israel's Hyrcanus.[106] Also contrary to Roman policy since the Bacchanalian Conspiracy, the Jews were allowed to gather freely for their special meetings.[107] Another example is that the Remans generally were careful to not parade their standards in Jerusalem, out of (largely pragmatic) respect for the Jewish sensitivity to "graven images."[108] As Bruce notes, "imperial policy respected the sanctity of the city" of Jerusalem.[109] Another significant tolerance was in regard to the standard Roman requirement over its conquered peoples "that the votary of the new religion should extend an equal tolerance to all those who did not share his views, and should add the conception of Rome's Imperial Divinity to his Pantheon at least nominally."[110] Contrary to common Roman practice in a polytheistic world, Israel was allowed to maintain its strict monotheism. Indeed, from Julius's times a number of other concessions were made to the Jews that were favorable to Israel.[111]

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105. Interestingly, Julius Caesar so affected the admiration of the Jews that they mourned his death according to Suetonius, *Julius* 845.

106. Josephus, *Antiquities 14101,5.*

107. Josephus, *Antiquities* 14108.

108. See Josephus, *Wars* 2, for one occasion on which this sensitivity was scoffed at with disastrous results by the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. Another example of a similar event is found in Philo, *To Gaius.*

109. Bruce, *History*, p. 35.

110. Henderson, Nero, p. 347.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 13. See Josephus, *Antiquites* 14:10:2-8.

The Jews responded to the favors of Rome (as varying as these were under different local procurators) by offering "sacrifices twice every day for Caesar, and for the Roman people." [112] This was doubtless regarded by Rome as "a very fair equivalent" [113] to the imposition of the Imperial Divinity's inclusion in the Pantheon of Rome's subjects. In other words, it appeased the emperor's expectation for some form of religious veneration by the Jews. [114]

At the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt (which became a full-fledged war from Rome's perspective when Nero commissioned Vespasian to suppress it), however, this protective offering in honor of Caesar was stopped. Josephus records the event:

> And at this time it was that some of those that principally excited the people to go to war, made an assault upon a certain fortress called Masada. They took it by treachery, and slew the Remans that were there, and put others of their own party to keep it. At the same time Eleazar, the son of Ananias the high priest, a very bold youth, who was at that time governor of the temple, persuaded those that officiated in the divine service to receive no gift or sacrifice for any foreigner. And this was the true beginning of our war with the Remans: for they rejected the sacrifice of Caesar on this account: and when many of the high priests and principal men besought them not to omit the sacrifice, which it was customary for them to offer for their princes, they would not be prevailed upon. [115]

The effect of this decision as it reflected upon the Roman emperor was that "its termination in the summer of A.D. 66 was tantamount to official renunciation of his authority."[116] This was the focal event that highlighted the extreme seriousness of the revolt of the Jews and that brought Roman imperial forces into the picture. In a real sense, the cessation of the Jewish sacrifices for the emperor resulted in the death of those in "the land," for a most gruesome and protracted war was waged against rebellious Israel. [117]

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112. Josephus, *Wars* 2:10:4. See also his *Against Apion* 2:5.

113. Henderson, Nero, p. 348.

114. One example exists of at least one emperor who felt it was not enough. The emperor Gaius complained: "You offered sacrifices for me, it is true, but you offered none to me," in Philo, *To Gaius* 357.

115. *Wars* 2:17:2.

116. Bruce, *History*, p. 139.

117. This seems to be the idea involved in the second Beast's killing those in the Land who did not worship the image of the Beast (Rev. 13:15).

But another matter arises in consideration of these affairs. The very fact that the cessation of Israel's religious honor of the emperor (through daily sacrifice) determined Rome's destructive response is indicative of the very seriousness with which the emperor conceived of emperor worship. In Rome's eyes, emperor worship may well have been deemed a purely political and symbolic act, and not a truly religious act.[118] But it was a deadly serious symbolic statement, one of such magnitude as to eventuate in war. Even symbolic actions are of serious historical consequence among most peoples; surely even early emperor worship, even if merely symbolic, had serious political implications that could result in the persecution and war of Revelation.

Returning to the motivation for Nero's persecution of the Christians "there seem to have been two counts in the indictment. By ancient rules each was tried separately. The first count probably, as Conybeare and Howson suggest, was complicity in the fire. . . . The second count was either *majestas* – almost anything could be brought under this head – or the new crime of being a Christian, the crime of 'the Name', in itself a mere variation, as we shall see later, of *majestas* or high treason. On this indictment there could be but one verdict"[119] As Henderson explains of this terrible episode: "In fact, Christianity and the State were inevitably hostile, just because neither could understand the position of the other. On the side of the State, a very great and a very justifiable value was attached to the conception of the Unity and the Unification of the whole Empire, which was expressed, and could be expressed only, in the idea and observance of Caesar-worship. This reverence paid to the Imperial idea as symbolised by the worship of Rome and Augustus 'united', as has been said, 'the peoples of the Empire from the Ocean to the Syrian desert.'" '[20] Thus, lurking behind the persecution, even if not in the forefront, is the cult of the emperor — a harbinger of things to come.

Additional questions could be explored with profit: Could it be that the circus Nero sponsored to initiate the persecution of the Christians in A.D. 64 was part of the veneration of the emperor, who

118. Except, of course, in the cases of the madcap emperors Caligula (Gaius) and Domitian, and surely that of the insane Nero.

119. Workman, *Persecution*, p. 16.

120. Henderson, *Life and Principate*, p. 353.

rode as the sun god in his chariot? [121] Could there be a two-fold meaning in the concept that the Christians were "*sacrificed* not on the *altar* of public interest, but to satisfy the cruelty of one man"? Were they in essence being "sacrificed" as on an "altar"?

These and other matters could be developed to fill out the picture. It should be clear, however, that the emperor cult motif in Revelation is no stumbling block to a Neronic date for the book.

Conclusion

Despite the vigorous employment of the emperor cult motif in Revelation as an evidence of its late date by some, the motif does *not* demand a post-Neronian date at all. We have seen and late date advocates even admit that the emperor cult was prevalent from the times of Julius Caesar. Its presence can be detected under each of the forerunners to Nero. To make matters worse for the late date school, the cult seems especially significant to Nero. Any objection to the early date of Revelation that involves the emperor cult must be discounted altogether. In point of historical fact, the emperor cult motif in Revelation fits well the circumstances demanded by early date advocacy.

121. Tacitus notes that 'Nero had offered his own gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited a circus show, mingling with the crowd, himself dressed as a charioteer or riding in a chariot" (*Annals* 15:4-4).

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THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Another argument prevalently employed by late date advocates is that which, as Morris notes, discovers "indications that Revelation was written in a time of persecution" — a persecution that accords "much better with Domitian."[1] Both Morris and Guthrie list this as their second arguments for the A.D. 95-96 date; Kümmel cites it first. This line of reasoning is given considerable attention by many modern late date scholars, including Morris, Guthrie, Kümmel, Mounce, Barnes, Hendrickson, and Beasley-Murray, for example.[2] Kümmel is quite confident that "the temporal scene which Rev. sketches fits no epoch of primitive Christianity so well as the time of the persecution under Domitian."[3]

It is indisputably clear from the perspective of Revelation's self-witness that imperial persecution against the faith has begun. We will cite two clear samples of references to this persecution by way of

1. Leon Morris, *The* Revelation *of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 36. See also James Moffatt, The *Revelation of St. John the Divine,* in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), pp. 317-320 (though his approach is much different, cp. p. 313). R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John, 2* vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1 :xciv-xcv. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation.* New International Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 33-34. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 951-953. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th cd., trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abindgon, 1973), p. 467.

2. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 36; Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 951; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 33; Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 467; Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on New Testament, 1* vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, rep. 1962) p. 1532; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), p. 20; G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation," in Francis Davidson, cd., New *Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 1168.

3. Kümmel, *Introduction*, p. 468.

introduction (these have been dealt with above in other connections). (1) Imbedded in the very opening statement of John, Revelation 1:9 is most significant in this regard in that it sets forth an important factor of the historical context of the writing of Revelation. In this statement John clearly indicates Revelation was written while he was banished "because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." This cannot be the result of Jewish persecution, for the Jews could not banish anyone, and certainly not to Patmos, an island used for Roman imperial banishment. (2) In Revelation 13 John speaks of the Beast waging war against the saints. This has been shown in other connections to be a clear reference to Roman persecution. Other references to persecution in Revelation may refer to Roman persecution, but arguments can be presented to show that many of these are of Jewish rather than Roman origin.[4] Nevertheless, these two are sufficient to demonstrate the existence of imperial persecution as an historical backdrop in Revelation.

Let us then turn our attention to a consideration of the merits of this late date argument from persecution.

Difficulties Confronting the Domitianic Argument

The majority of commentators agree that Revelation definitely breathes the atmosphere of violent persecution.[5] But in regard to the matter of the imperial persecution the question arises: Which persecution, the Neronic or the Domitianic? It is most interesting at the outset of our investigation and quite instructive for our inquiry to note that several very capable late date advocates demur from employment of the persecution evidences in arguing the Domitianic

4. For the Jewish character of the other persecutions see J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming, 2nd* ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1887] 1983), pp. 365ff.; Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York: Cassell, 1884), pp. 437ff.; Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, rep. 1974), pp. 466ff.; P. S. Desprez, The *Apocalypse Fulfilled*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1855), *passim*; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), *passim*; Cornelis Vanderwaal, *Search the Scriptures*, 10 vols., trans. Theodore Plantinga (St. Catherine's, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1979), vol. 10.

5. One noted commentator who does not see Revelation's milieu as including persecution is Barclay Newman in "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis. A Critique of the Irenaeus Source as a Witness for the Contemporary-Historieal Approach to the Interpretation of the Apocalypse," New *Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):133-139.

date. Notable among these are leading Revelation commentators H. B. Swete, R. H. Charles, James Moffatt, and J. P. M. Sweet, who do not employ the argument at all to prove the late date.[6] Another, Arthur Peake, makes a damaging admission for those late date advocates seeking to make use of this argument: "it is unquestionable that the Book has in its present form a background of persecution. Unhappily the whole subject of the relations between the Church and the Empire is involved in great obscurity, so that it is somewhat precarious to use hypotheses as to the history of these relations as a test for the date of New Testament documents."7

Ladd, another late date advocate, even writes of this evidence that "the problem with this theory is that there is no evidence that during the last decade of the first century there occurred any open and systematic persecution of the church."8 Reginald H. Fuller argues for a Domitianic date of Revelation but advises that "there is otherwise no evidence for the persecution of Christians in Asia Minor" under Domitian.[9] Morris himself concurs with Fuller's assessment as to the difficulty of discovering documentary evidence for an empire-wide Domitianic persecution. [10] He falls back on his view of the *possibilities*: "But as far as establishing the date of the book goes, all that we can say from the evidence of persecution is that it accords with all that we know of Domitian that there should have been such persecution, and that there is no other period in the first century which fits nearly as well. " [11] David H. van Daalen, still another late date advocate, concurs in admitting that we "have no evidence that there was any persecution under Domitian." [12] Newman agrees.'3

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6. J. P. M. Sweet even discourages reference *to* it; Sweet, *Revelation.* Westminster Pelican Commentaries (Philadelphia Westminster, 1979), pp. 24-25.

7. Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919), p. 93.

8. George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 8. He also denies that there was any "worldwide persecution of the church" in the first century that could be reflected in Revelation (p. 9). It should be noted, however, that Ladd's futurist approach to Revelation may form a hidden agenda in his making such declarations.

9. Reginald H. Fuller, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament* (Letchworth Duckworth, 1971), p. 187.

10. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 36.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

12. David H. van Daalen, *A Guide to the Revelation,* TEF Study Guide 20 (London: SPCK, 1986), p. 3.

13. Newman, "Fallacy," *passim.*

Often New Testament scholars have found themselves at odds with Roman historians on the matter of the empire-wide Domitianic persecution of Christianity.[14] Many scholars understand Domitian's violent outburst as concentrating on "selected individuals whom he suspected of undermining his authority."[15] The problem with the evidence for this persecution is that it proceeds almost solely from Christian sources – sources somewhat later than the events. For instance, the earliest specific evidence for a general (that is, empire wide) persecution of Christianity under Domitian is Melito of Sardis who flourished in the middle of the second century.[16] Modern Roman historians often surmise that the ancient Roman hatred of Domitian (they deemed him a second Nero)[17] affected Christian belief later. Even some competent evangelical New Testament scholars have begun to question the evidence for a Dornitianic persecution against Christianity. Moule and Ladd write of "the alleged persecution" under Domitian.[18] After reviewing the ancient evidence, Hort notes of the data regarding Domitian's outrageous conduct that "there is nothing in the accounts which suggests anything like a general persecution of Christians, even at Rome: it would rather seem that Christians of wealth or station were mainly, if not wholly, struck at."[19] Bruce admits of Domitian's reputation as a persecutor that the

14. E. G. Hardy states that evidence for the Domitianic persecution rests only on "probable and indirect evidence" (*Christianity* and *the Roman Government* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1925], p. 76).

15. Glenn W. Barker, William L. Lane, and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks (New* York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 368. Edmundson writes that Domitian's was "not a general persecution at all, but a series of isolated acts directed chiefly against a few influential persons, including members of his own family" (George Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* [London: Longman's, Green, 1913], p. 168). R. L. Milburn suggests that Domitian was "suspicious of people rather than of their beliefs" (Milburn, "The Persecution of Domitian" *Church Quarterly Review 139 [1944-45]*:155).

16. Melito protested to the emperor Marcus Aurelius that "of all the emperors it was Nero and Domitian alone who, at the instigation of certain persons" assailed the Christian Church See Lactantius, *The Death of the Persecutors 3.* The statement in 1 Clement 1:1 regarding "the sudden and repeated misfortunes and calamities which have befallen us" may have been written in the late 60s, but if in the 90s "in the absence of more explicit information we cannot be sure that he refers to an outbreak of persecutions" (F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* [Garden City, NY Anchor Books, 1969], p. 412).

17. Juvenal *Satires* 4:37ff.

18. C. F. D. Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York Harper & Row, 1982), p. 153; Ladd, Revelation, p. 9.

19. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: Z-HI* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xxiv.

"evidence to justify this reputation is scanty."[20] Despite his employment of the Domitianic persecution as one of the major proofs of the late date, Morris himself admits that the evidence for a general persecution under Domitian "is not easy to find" ![21]

The only non-Christian evidence for a Domitianic persecution of Christianity is based on an ambiguous statement from Dio Cassius' *Roman History*, a history produced quite sometime after the events.[22] Dio states that Domitian's cousin Flavius Clemens was executed and his wife banished on the basis of the charge of "atheism," a charge that Dio equates with the practice of Judaism. Besides the ambiguity of the statement itself (is this "atheism" really Christianity, as some argue?), two-thirds of Die's writing is preserved for us in an eleventh century epitome and a twelfth century summary. Cary argues, and Bell agrees, that the section dealing with Domitian was produced "*very* carelessly."[23] Bell's article in *New Testament Studies* provides an excellent analysis both of the difficulty of establishing a general persecution under Domitian and of the questionable utility of the evidence from Dio Cassius.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that though Suetonius credited Nero with the persecution of Christians, he makes no mention of Domitian's alleged persecution.[24] It would seem that since he viewed the punishment of Christians as praiseworthy under Nero, that any general persecution of them under Domitian would have deserved comment.

Thus, the documentary evidence for a general imperial persecution of Christianity under Domitian is deemed questionable by a number of competent scholars. This fact alone should render this second leading proof of a late date for Revelation suspect. Even a good number of knowledgeable late date advocates doubt the usefulness of such an argument. Not only is the evidence suspect, but even if accepted, it reveals a persecution inferior in every respect to the Neronic persecution, as will be shown.

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20. Bruce, Histoty,p.412.

21. Morns, *Revelation,* pp. 36-37.

22. His dates are A.D. 150-235.

23. Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, trans. Ernest Cary, 9 vols. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1968) 1:xxiii.

24. Nero 16:2.

The Suitability of the Evidence for the Neronic Argument

As has been shown, the very historicity of a Domitianic persecution of Christianity has been brought into question. Such cannot be the case with the persecution under Nero. Although many scholars argue that the Neronic persecution was confined to Rome and its environs, the indisputable fact remains: Nero cruelly persecuted Christianity, taking even the lives of its foremost leaders, Peter and Paul. The evidence for the Neronic persecution is overwhelming and is documentable from heathen, as well as Christian, sources. Let us survey a portion of the evidence from the original sources and then return to consider the significance of the data.

The Documentary Evidence for a Neronic Persecution

The earliest evidence for Nero's persecuting wrath upon the Christians is found in Clement's epistle to the Corinthians (designated 1 Clement). Previously we saw that there is good reason to believe that 1 Clement was written in the late 60s. Even if the later date for the composition of Clement be accepted, however, the evidence still is early, being about A.D. 95-97. What is more, the evidence is from one who lived in Rome and who knew many of those who were slain by Nero.

In 1 Clement 5 reference is made to the persecution of the apostles, then in section 6 Clement tells us that "unto these men were gathered a *vast multitude* of the elect, who through many indignities and tortures, being the victims of jealousy, set a brave example among ourselves." 1 Clement 7 is given as an exhortation to those who remained of the Roman congregation, that they, too, should "conform to the glorious and venerable rule which bath been handed down to us."

Tertullian – who was a lawyer[25] and who wrote in Latin, the legal language of the Roman Empire – challenges men to search the archives of Rome for the proof that Nero persecuted the Church. In his Scorpion's *Sting* he writes: "And if a heretic wishes his confidence to rest upon a public record, the archives of the empire will speak,

25. Eusebius calls him "a man accurately acquainted with the Roman laws." He also speaks of him as "particularly distinguished among the eminent men of Rome" (*Ecclesiastical History* 2:2:4)

as would the stones of Jerusalem. We read the lives of the Caesars: At Rome Nero was the first who stained with blood the rising faith."[26] Surely he would not issue a challenge to search the archives of Rome, that could easily be taken and just as easily refuted, were his statement untrue.

Eusebius, who had access to documents no longer available to us, concurs with Tertullian: "When the rule of Nero was now gathering strength for the unholy objects he began to take up arms against the worship of the God of the universe." He goes on to note very clearly of Nero that "he was the first of the emperors to be pointed out as a foe of divine religion."[27]

Sulpicius Severus writes of Nero:

> He first attempted to abolish the name of Christian, in accordance with the fact that vices are inimical to virtues, and that all good men are ever regarded by the wicked as casting reproach upon them. For, at that time, our divine religion had obtained a wide prevalence in the city. . . .
>
> . . . .
>
> In the meantime, the number of the Christians being very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire, while Nero was stationed at Antium. . . . He therefore turned the accusation against the Christians, and the most cruel tortures were accordingly afflicted upon the innocent. . . . In this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians.[28]

Orosius speaks of this persecution in his works, when he writes of Nero that "he was the first at Rome to torture and inflict the penalty of death upon Christians, and he ordered them throughout all the provinces to be afflicted with like persecution; and in his attempt to wipe out the very name, he killed the most blessed apostles of Christ, Peter and Paul."[29] Supplementary to these references are those given in Chapter 12 above that show Nero to be the Beast, some from Church fathers, some from the Christian Sibylline Oracles.

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26. Scorpion's Sting 15. It is interesting that in this regard he only mentions Nero's persecution as afflicting the Apostles.

27. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2:25.

28. Sulpicius *Severus, Sacred History 2:28,29.*

29. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* 7:7. *See* Roy Joseph Deferrari, cd., *The Fathers of the Church, vol. 50* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), pp. 298-299.

To the advantage of proving the Neronic persecution, the Christian testimony is well-supplemented by heathen historians. Roman historian Tacitus, who was born during the early days of the reign of Nero and who wrote under the reign of Trajan, gives a most detailed and terrifying account of the beginning of the persecution:

> But by no human contrivance, whether lavish distributions of money or of offerings to appease the gods, could Nero rid himself of the ugly rumor that the fire was due to his orders. So to dispel the report, he substituted as the guilty persons and inflicted unheard-of punishments on those who, detested for their abominable crimes, were vulgarly called Christians. . . .
>
> So those who first confessed were hurried to the trial, and then, on their showing, an immense number were involved in the same fate, not so much on the charge of incendiaries as from hatred of the human race. And their death was aggravated with mockeries, insomuch that, wrapped in the hides of wild beasts, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or fastened to crosses to be set on fire, that when the darkness fell they might be burned to illuminate the night. Nero had offered his own gardens for the spectacle, and exhibited a circus show, mingling with the crowd, himself dressed as a charioteer or riding in a chariot. Whence it came about that, though the victims were guilty and deserved the most exemplary punishment, a sense of pity was aroused by the feeling that they were sacrificed not on the altar of public interest, but to satisfy the cruelty of one man.[30]

Suetonius credits as one of Nero's positive contributions as emperor[31] that he persecuted Christians: "During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures. . . . Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. "3[2] The evidence is from such sources and of such a nature that the existence of a Neronic persecution of Christianity cannot be denied.

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30. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

31. He states later "I have brought together these acts of his, some of which are beyond criticism, while others are even deserving of no slight praise, to separate them from his shameful and criminal deeds, of which I shall proceed now to give an account" (*Nero* 19:3).

32. Suetonius, *Nero* 162.

The Significance of the Evidence for a Neronic Persecution

As the evidence for the Neronic persecution is scrutinized, we must bear in mind that it clearly demonstrates, first, that Christians were punished, and that they were punished as *Christians.* Both Tacitus and Suetonius make reference to the fact that those punished were members of that hated religious sect. Suetonius mentions *to* Nero's *credit* that the "Christians" were punished as members of a "new and mischievous supers tition. " Tacitus speaks of them as "Christians" and as "detested" by the populace and as "guilty" of criminal activity. 33 Clearly the hated religious commitment of the Christians marked them out as worthy of punishment in the minds of the heathen populace.[34]

These Christians were not punished as Jews, as may have been done by imperial confusion under Claudius when Jews were banished from Rome because of "Chrestus" (Christ) .[35] It is clear that although Rome had previously confused Christianity as a sect ofJudaism and

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33. The "crimes" of the Christians have nothing to do with the fire – Tacitus admits that Nero looked for scapegoats. The "crimes" of the Christians had to do with their aloofness from the "culture" of Rome. "The principles in which they gloried . . . forbade them to recognise the national gods or the religion of the Roman people, or to take part in any of the public religious ceremonies or spectacles, or in that worship of the *genius* of Caesar . . ." (Edmundson, *Church in Rome,* p. 137). Tacitus's reference to the Christians indicates they were thought to have a hatred for the human race: *odio humani generis (Annals* 15:44); *see* B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the* Emperor Nero (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 436-437. Ramsay wrote of this comment: "To the Remans genus *humanum* meant. not mankind in general., but the Roman world – men who lived according to Roman manners and laws; the rest of the human race were enemies and barbarians. The Christians then were enemies to civilised man and to the customs and laws which regulated civilised society. They were bent on relaxing the bonds that held society together . . ." (William M. Ramsay,*The Church in the* Roman *Empire Before A.D. 170* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1897) 1979, p. 236).

34. Some have argued that the name "Christian" was uncommon in Nero's day and was only used proleptically by the second century historians Tacitus and Suetonius. But these were men who freely derived their historical research from contemporary sources. Furthermore, Peter speaks of the Neronian persecution when he writes: "If a man suffer as a Christian let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this Name" (1 Pet. 416). The name "Christian" was popularly employed in Antioch well before the 60s (Acts 11:26) and was even familiar to King Agrippa (Acts 2628). Pliny's correspondence to Trajan also suggests that the name "Christian" was long known among imperial authorities by A.D. 112.

35. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25:4: "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome." That Christians were affected by this banishment is evident from Acts 18:2. Obviously, the fact that many Christians were Jewish confused the Remans into considering Christianity a Jewish sect.

had thus tolerated it as a *religio licita* under the umbrella of Judaism, such was no longer to be the case. Many scholars note that Christianity was first recognized as a separate religion and was increasingly regarded as a *religio illicita* in the period beginning with Nero's opening persecution and ending in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.[36] Workman confidently asserts that

> we can date with some certainty this distinction in the official mind between Jew and Christian as first becoming clear in the summer of 64. The acquittal of St. Paul in 61 or 62 – an event we may fairly assume as probable — is proof that in that year Christianity, a distinct name for which was only slowly coming into use, could still claim that it was a *religio licita* . . . still recognized as a branch of Judaism. . . . At any rate, both Nero and Rome now clearly distinguished between the *religio licita* of Judaism and the new sect. . . . The destruction of Jerusalem would remove the last elements of confusion.[37]

The distinction having become evident, the situation which arose was that "once Christianity presented itself in the eyes of the law and the authorities as a religion distinct from that ofJudaism, its character as a *religio illicita* was assured. No express decree was needed to make this plain. In fact, the 'non *licet*' was rather the presupposition underlying all the imperial rescripts against Christianity. "3[8]

It is indisputably the case that Christianity was persecuted by Nero Caesar. The evidence for a Domitianic persecution is immeasurably weaker, and thus the argument for a Domitianic setting for Revelation is also weaker.

Second, we learn from both pagan and Christian sources that not only were Christians punished, but they were punished in huge numbers. Not only so, but the Neronic persecution was more gruesome and longer lasting in comparison to the alleged Domitianic persecution. Tacitus speaks of an "immense number" (*multitudo in-*

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36. Ramsay, *Church in Roman Empire*, pp. 251; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, 8* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:377-381; Herbert B. Workman, *Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1906] 1980), p. 22; Sweet, *Revelation,* p. 28; Peake, *Revelation*, p. 94.

37. Workman, *Persecution*, p. 22.

38. Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* in *the First Three Centuries, 2* vols. *(New* York: G. P. Putnam's, 1908) 2:116.

gem) of Christians who were hurried to trial under Nero.[39] The reliability of Tacitus on this matter has been rigorously defended by Ramsay, who was a late date advocate in regard to Revelation.[40] Of Tacitus's further observation that the spectacle ultimately sickened the populace, Ramsay notes that "it can have been no inconsiderable number and no short period which brought satiety to a populace accustomed to find their greatest amusement in public butcheries, frequently recurring on a colossal scale."[41] Henderson is convinced that Tacitus's statement "is a plain statement. I see no reason for holding it an anachronism or denying it."[42] To Tacitus's testimony can be added the Christian testimony of Clement of Rome. As one intimately concerned (and most probably even personally involved), Clement noted that a "vast multitude of the elect" suffered "many indignities and tortures. "[43]

When this material regarding the Neronic persecution is contrasted to that of the Domitianic persecution, the picture becomes even more convincing. Scholars of historical learning see remarkable differences between the two. Henderson refers to the Domitianic persecution (which he accepts as involving Christians) as a "squall of persecution."[44] He goes on to state that "there is at least even among the credulous no disputing the fact that such a persecution, if it did occur, was both very shortlived and of no lasting consequence."[45]

Earlier in the present work we noted that the Neronic persecution lasted over three years, until the death of Nero.[46] In comparing the two persecutions, Lightfoot speaks of "the earlier and more severe assault on the Christians in the latter years of the reign of Nero."[47]

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39. *Annals* 15:44.

40. Ramsay, *Church in Roman Empire,* pp. *228-229.*

41. Ibid., p. 241.

42 Henderson, Nero, p. 436.

43. 1 Clement 6. Clement's phrase *πολὺ πλῆθος* is identical in import with Tacitus's *ingens multitudo (Annals* 15:44) *as* well *as* with John's *ὄχλος πολύς* in Revelation 7:9 and 19:1, 6.

44. B. W. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 45.

45. *Ibid.*

46. See Chapter 14.

47. Joseph B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1984), p. 3.

Hort concurs: "The whole language about Rome and the empire, Babylon and the Beast, fit the last days of Nero and the time immediately following, and does not fit the short local reign of terror under Domitian. Nero affected the imagination of the world as Domitian, as far as we know, never did."[48] The gruesome cruelty of Nero's persecution has already been noted from Tacitus: Christians were "wrapped in the hides of wild beasts, they were torn to pieces by dogs" and were "fastened to crosses to be set on fire."[49]

Thus, the sheer magnitude and the extreme cruelty of Nero's persecution of Christianity are most suggestive of its suitability for fulfillment of the role required in Revelation. Athough the debate is involved and inconclusive "there is some reason to believe that there was actual legislation against Christians in Rome under Nero."[50] Demonstration of this fact, however, is not necessary to establishing our argument.

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48. Hort, *Apocalypse*, p. xxvi.

49. Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.

50. C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 154. Though there has been intense debate as to the question of Nero's persecution's basis in legislative action, there is good evidence to suggest it was so: (1) Tertullian speaks of the "Neronian institution," *Apol.* 5:3; Sulpicius Severus indicates the same, *Chron.* 11:29:3. (2) Suetonius strongly implies such, Nero 16. (2) 1 Pet. 415 is more easily understock in such a situation. See especially Jules Lebreton and Jacques Zeiller, *History of the Primitive Church*, trans. Ernest C. Messenger, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 374-381. See also Moule, *Birth of New Testament*, pp. 154ff.; and John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 234ff.

Many of the passages that the persecution is declared to exist in probably refer to either the Jewish persecution of Christianity or to the Roman overthrow of Jerusalem, according to a number of early date advocates, including the present writer.

Others who argued that the legal proscription of Christianity was as early as under Nero's latter reign include:

S. Angus, "Roman Empire," *Integration Standard Bible Encyclopedia [ISBE]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1915) 4:2607. Angus cites Mommsen and Sanday as adherents.

E. G. Hardy, *Christianity and Roman Government (New* York Burt Franklin, [1971] 1894), p. 77.

J. L. Ratton, The *Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1912), p. 14.

J. Stevenson, cd., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A.D. 337 (New* York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 3.

Edmundson, *Church in Rome*, pp. 125ff.

Peake, *Revelation,* p. 111.

Workman, *Persecution,* pp. 20ff.

Henderson held this view and cited the following authors: B. Aubé, Gaston Boissier, Theodor Keim, J. B. Bury, Charles Menvale, F. W. Farrar, Henry Fumeaux, A. H. Raabe, Ernest Renan, and Pierre Batiffol; Henderson, *Nero*, p. 435.

Third, although the matter is still subject to debate, there is reason to believe that the Neronic persecution extended beyond Rome and into the provinces. At least there is more suggestive evidence for this being the case under Nero than under Domitian. Since Christianity had become a *religio illicita* and the emperor himself had taken severe measures to suppress it, almost certainly we can expect that at least by imitation provincial magistrates would engage themselves in the matter. As late date advocate William Ramsay suggests: "we conclude that if Tacitus has correctly represented his authorities, the persecution of Nero, begun for the sake of diverting popular attention, was continued as a permanent police measure under the form of a general prosecution of Christians as a sect dangerous to the public safety. . . . When Nero had once established the principle in Rome, his action served as a precedent in every province. There is no need to suppose a general edict or formal law. The precedent would be quoted in every case where a Christian was accused."[51] Surely it would be the case that "the example set by the emperor in the capital could hardly be without influence in the provinces, and would justify the outbreak of popular hatred."[52] Other competent scholars concur.[53]

Evidently Pliny's famous correspondence with Trajan (c. A.D. 113) implies a long-standing imperial proscription of Christianity, a proscription surely earlier and certainly more severe than Domitian's.[54] Although it once was held by many that Pliny's correspondence was evidence that the policy of proscribing Christianity was a new policy of Trajan, this view is "now almost universally abandoned."[55] In Pliny's inquiry to Trajan as to how to treat the Christians brought before him, he is concerned with a standing legal proscription.

51. Ramsay, *Church in Roman Empire,* pp. 241, 245.

52. Schaff, *History* 1:384.

53. F. J. A. Hort, *The First Epistle of St Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1898), p. 2; Henderson, *Church* in *Rome,* p. 137; Angus, "Roman Empire," *ISBE 42607;* John Laurence von Mosheim, *History of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (New* York. Converse, 1854) 1: 141ff.; Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, 2* vols. (Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 1 :222ff. Schaff cites Ewald, Renan, C. L. Roth, and Weiseler as assuming "that Nero condemned and prohibited Christianity as dangerous to the state" (*History* 1:384, n. 1).

54. Hort, *1 Peter,* p. 2.

55. S. Angus, "Roman Empire" in *ISBE 42607.*

> Pliny knew that for some time past the Christians had been legally regarded as the enemies of the state and that confession of the name meant outlawry. . . . The Rescript of Trajan merely confirmed in writing the practice, which had subsisted since the time of Nero, of treating the very name of Christian as a crime against the State.[56]

Angus comments on the view held by "Hardy (Christianity *and the Roman Government, 77),* Mommsen (*Expos,* 1893, 1-7) and Sanday (*ib, 1894,* 406ff.) – and adopted by the writer of this article – that the trial of the Christians under Nero resulted in the declaration of the mere profession of Christianity as a crime punishable by death. . . . [T]he Neronian persecution settled the future attitude of the Roman state toward the new faith. "5[7]

Ancient evidence suggestive of the provincial persecution of Christianity is not of the earliest date, but is significant because of its reported reliance on Tacitus and perhaps even on Tacitus's lost works. Orosius states that after Nero tortured Christians, he "ordered this throughout all the provinces, with the same excruciating persecution."[58] In the seventh book of Orosius's history, in which he provides an account of both the fire and the persecution, "Orosius shows himself to be thoroughly acquainted with the writings of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Josephus, all of which he quotes by name."[59] Sulpicius Severus writes regarding Nero's persecution that "in this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians. Afterwards, too, their religion was prohibited by laws that were enacted; and by edicts openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a Christian. At that time Paul and Peter were condemned to death, the former being beheaded with a sword, while Peter suffered crucifixion."[60]

Conclusion

The evidence of a general persecution against Christianity under Nero is strong and almost universally recognized. Its cruelty, extent, and length are most compatible with the requirements of the Revelational record. Not only so, but the Domitianic evidence is meager

56. Edmundson, *Church in Rome,* p. 139, n. 1.
57. Angus, "Roman Empire," *ISBE* 4:2607.
58. Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* 7:7.
59. Edmundson, *Church in Rome,* p. 143.
60. Severus, *Sacred History* 2:29.

and, if accepted, Domitian's persecution pales in comparison. Interestingly, while admitting that "the evidence for widespread persecution under Domitian is not especially strong," Mounce goes on rather boldly to add that yet "there is no other period in the first century in which it would be more likely" ![61]

Furthermore, the very chronological occurrence of the Neronic persecution is more suitable to Revelation's treatment. "To all appearance, at Rome, the Christian Church was drowning in its own blood in Nero's reign. We must consider the feeling of the ordinary Christian – the man in the street, so to speak – and look at it from his point of view. In later persecutions men had got to know that the Church could survive the furious edicts of Rome. But that was just the doubt which presented itself to the mind of the average Christian man in Nero's time."[62] No imperial persecution other than the very first would be more important to establishing the durability of the faith. No imperial persecution more than this one required a word of exhortation and consolation to the beleaguered faith.

61. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 34.
62. Ratton, *Apocalypse*, p. 87.

18

THE *NERO REDIVIVUS* MYTH

Morris's third evidence for a Domitianic date for Revelation is the ancient Nero *Redivivus* myth, which he briefly explains and confidently employs: "Again, it is urged that the book shows evidence of knowledge of the Nero *redivivus* myth (e.g. xvii. 8, 11). After Nero's death it was thought in some circles that he would return. At first this appears to have been a refusal to believe that he was actually dead. Later it took the form of a belief that he would come to life again. This took time to develop and Domitian's reign is about as early as we can expect it."[1] Swete lists the myth as the first of the "more definite" evidences for a late date: "There are other indications of date which are more definite, and point in the same direction. (*a*) It is impossible to doubt that the legend of Nero *Redivivus* is in full view of the Apocalyptist in more than one passage (xiii. 3, 12, 14, xvii. 8)."[2]

Form critic Moffatt boldly asserts that "the phase of the Nero-redivivus myth which is represented in the Apocalypse cannot be earlier than at least the latter part of Vespasian's reign."[3] In his commentary on Revelation 17 he speaks strongly of the role of the myth in interpreting the passage, when he notes that "the latter trait is unmistakably due to the legend of Nero redivivus, apart from which the oracle is unintelligible."4 Charles, a fellow form critic, is equally confident of the utility of the *Nero Redivivus* myth in establishing Revelation's date: "*The Nero-redivivus myth appears implicitly and*

1. Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 37.

2. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary* on *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), pp. ci-cii.

3. James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament*, vol. *5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 1980), p. 317.

4. *Ibid.*, p. *450.*

explicitly in several forms in our text, the latest of which cannot be earlier than the age of Domitian."[5] He sees the myth as growing in stages of development and its reaching the developmental stage employed in Revelation only by Domitian's time.[6] Mounce lists as the first of his lesser arguments[7] "for the Domitianic date of Revelation "the particular form of the Nero myth which underlies chapters 13 and 17." He follows the typical pattern of late date thinking when he notes that the myth "could not have developed and been generally accepted until near the end of the century."8 Kümmel mentions the myth as requiring a late date, but he only mentions this in passing.[9] A good number of other scholars employ the myth as helpful in dating Revelation in Domitian's reign. [10]

These few scholars – representatives of liberal and of conservative scholarship – demonstrate the role of the Nero *Redivivus* myth in dating Revelation from the late date perspective. Before actually considering the merits of their case, a brief introduction to the myth itself will be necessary.

The Myth Explained

The specific passages of Revelation that are deemed expressive of the currency of the *Nero Redivivus* myth are Revelation 13:3, 14 and 17:8, 11:

> And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound

5. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John,* 2 vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1920) I:xcv. Emphasis in the original.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xcvi.

7. His major arguments are two: (1) the role of emperor worship and (2) the widespread prevalence of persecution. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of* Revelation. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), pp. 32-34.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

9. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament,* 17th cd., trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), p. 468.

10. For example:

Arthur S. Peake, *The Revelation of John* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1919), pp. 123-133.

Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1917] 1967), pp. 400-403.

John Paul Pritchard, *A Literary Approach to the New Testament* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), p. 303.

Howard Clark Kee, *Understanding the New Testament,* 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983), p. 339.

Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament.* Records of Civilization XV (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 277.

> was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast (13:3).
>
> And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life (13:14).
>
> The beast that you saw was and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come (17:8).
>
> And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction (17:11).

In his commentary at Revelation 13:3 conservative commentator Swete spoke of the myth more fully:

> If it be asked whether any of the earlier Roman Emperors received a death-blow from which he recovered or was supposed to have recovered, the answer is not far to seek. In June 68 Nero, pursued by the emissaries of the Senate, inflicted upon himself a wound of which he died. His remains received a public funeral, and were afterwards lodged in the mausoleum of Augustus. Nevertheless there grew up in the eastern provinces of the Empire a rumour that he was still alive, and in hiding. Pretenders who claimed to be Nero arose in 69 and 79, and even as late at 88 or 89. . . . The legend of Nero's survival or resuscitation took root in the popular imagination, and Dion Chrysostom . . . at the end of the century sneers at it as one of the follies of the time. Meanwhile the idea of Nero's return had begun to take its place in the creations of Jewish and Christian fancy. . . . The legend has been used by St John to represent the revival of Nero's persecuting policy by Domitian. [11]

Nero so fearfully impressed the world in his era that pagan, Jewish, and Christian legends quickly began to grow up around his death and to assert themselves among the general populace throughout the far-flung reaches of the empire. Pretenders to the imperial

11. Swete, *Revelation*, p. 163. Robinson is not impressed with the "elaborate attempts to trace stages in the development of this myth" by Peake, BeckWith, and Charles (John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* [Philadelphia Westminster, 1976], p. 245 and note).

throne are recorded to have employed the myth in quests for power. In the pagan literature references to the expectation of Nero's return after his fall from power can be found in the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Xiphilinus, Zonaras, and Dion Chrysostom. [12] Among Jewish Talmudists the myth surfaces in the tract Gittin, [13] The Ascension of Isaiah (4:2ff), as well as in the Jewish Sibylline Oracles. In Christian circles it is mentioned in books by Lactantius, Sulpicius Severus, Jerome, and Augustine. [14] Several Sibylline Oracles of various origins – Christian, Jewish, and pagan – use the myth, as well. [15]

Clearly the existence, spread, and influence of the Nero *Redivivus* myth cannot be disputed. It is a unique legend in all of political history. But the questions that must here be dealt with are: Does Revelation employ the myth? And if it does, does the employment of it necessitate a late date for the composition of Revelation?

Early Date Response if the Myth Be Accepted

Despite the confidence with which some late date advocates employ the *Nero Redivivus* myth, it is of more than a little interest to note briefly two intriguing facts. First, not all late date proponents allow the argument as significant to the question of the dating of Revelation. While establishing the arguments for the Domitianic date for Revelation, Guthrie, a most able late date adherent, considers the merits of the Nero *Redivivus* argument, but discourages its endorsement in the debate: "[I] t must be regarded as extremely inconclusive for a Domitianic date. The most that can be said is that it may possibly point to this." [16]

Astonishingly, Mounce uses the myth as an evidence for the late date of Revelation in his introduction to his commentary, but then

12. Taeitus, *Histories* 1:2; 2:8, *9;* Suetonius, *Nero 40, 57; Domitian 6;* Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 63:9:3; *66:* 19:3; Xiphilinus 64:9; Zonaras, *Annals* 11:151-8; and Dion Chrysostom, *Oratwru21.*

13. *See* Frederic W. Farrar, *The Early Days of Christianity (New* York: Cassell, 1884), p. 467.

14. Lactantius, On *The Death of the Persecutors 2;* Sulpicius Severus, *Sacred History* 2:28; Jerome, *Daniel* 11:28; and Augustine, The *City of God* 20:19:3.

15. *Sibylline Oracles* 3:63ff.; *4:* 115ff.; 5:33ff.; 8:68ff.; 12:78; 13:89ff.

16. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction,* 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 954.

does not allow it as an assured interpretation in his commentary on the appropriate passages ! In fact, at Revelation 13:3, after mentioning the Nero *Redivivus* myth, he refutes the application to Nero: "A basic problem with identifying the slain head as Nero (or any specific emperor), is that the text does not say that the *head* was restored. It was the *beast* who recovered from the death-stroke upon one of his heads."[17] He then immediately offers optional interpretations that he deems more likely. At Revelation 17:11 he states of the interpretation he seems to favor that "this interpretation requires no reliance upon the Nero Redivivus myth." 18 If the Nero *Redivivus* myth is noteworthy as an historical datum for establishing the date of the book, why would it not be demonstrably present in these very passages? Why does he hesitate to employ it?

Second, a number of *early date* advocates accept the myth as existent within Revelation, but nevertheless maintain their Neronic dating position. Among older early date commentators who employ the myth we can list Stuart, Russell, Henderson, Macdonald, and Farrar.[19] Robinson stands out as a contemporary early date voice for the *Nero Redivivus* myth: "[A]s virtually all agree, there must be a reference to Nero *redivivus* in the beast that 'once was alive and is alive no longer but has yet to ascend out of the abyss before going to perdition.' "2° It is most interesting to find proponents of widely different dating schools able to admit the presence of an element that one school proffers as a leading proof for its position!

Harbingers of the Myth

Beyond these two initial problems, however, there are significant and reasonable possibilities available to hand that wholly undermine

17. Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 253.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 316.

19. Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (Andover: Allen, Morrill, and Wardwell, 1845) 2:436ff.; J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Study of the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1887] 1983), pp. 557ff.; B. W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Nero* (London: Methuen, 1903), pp. 418ff.; James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877, pp. 164ff.; Farrar, *Early Days*, pp. 464-474. Diisterdieck cites the following early date adherents as employing the myth in their commentaries: Lucke, De Wette, Bleek, Baur, Volkmar, Hilgenfeld, and Renan (Friedrich Diisterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 3rd cd., trans. Henry E. Jacobs [New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886], p. 371).

20. Robinson, *Redating*, p. 245.

the Nero *Redivivus* argument for a late date. Granting for the moment the validity of the Johannine employment of the Nero *Redivivus* myth,[21] we must understand that there were well-known harbingers of the dread that Nero would cause, of his untimely demise, and, it was believed, of the fortunes he would later regain. The *Nero Redivivus* myth did not come from nowhere. Its seed was firmly planted early in his reign and well-watered by the deluge of tyranny that he unleashed in the later years of his reign. In fact, "this popular belief in regard to Nero was founded on a prediction of the soothsayers in the early part of his reign."[22] Stuart argues quite ably that it had ample time to disseminate from this early prediction.[23] An important passage from Suetonius reads: "Astrologers had predicted to Nero that he would one day be repudiated, which was the occasion of that well known saying of his: CA humble art affords us daily bread,' doubtless uttered to justify him in practicing the art of lyre-playing, as an amusement while emperor, but a necessity for a private citizen. Some of them, however, had promised him the rule of the East, when he was cast off, a few expressly naming the sovereignty of Jerusalem, and several the restitution of all his former fortunes. "[24] Judging from Suetonius, a number of astrological predictions were made regarding Nero well before his death. For such predictions to be made among a credulous and superstitious population regarding an emperor later shown to be a mad man, they must have had their influence on the Nero *Redivivus* myth.

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21. The alleged use of such a popular myth by a writer of Scripture is not necessarily inimical to the revelational quality of Scripture. If it is indeed employed, such would be an *argumentum ex concessis*. The very use of it by such conservative scholars as cited previously should indicate such. After all, did not Paul pick up on popular thought to illustrate a point when he wrote: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true" (Tit, 1:12, 13) ? Stuart illustrates the matter further by reference to Christ's sayings about the Pharisees casting out demons and about demons wandering through dry places (Stuart, *Apocalypse* 1 :325). He wrote in addition that "We cannot rationally suppose John to have believed the heathen predictions, that Nero would rise from the dead and actually reappear as emperor. The most that we can reasonably suppose, is an allusion to the common report, and in this way to give a hint as to the individual who is meant to be designated by the beast. In short the more I reflect on these circumstances, the more I am compelled to believe, that John wrote his book pending the Neronian persecution" *(ibid.* 1:277-278).

22. Macdonald, *Life* and *Writngs*, p. 165.

23. Stuart, *Apocalypse* 2:435.

24. Suetonius, *Nero* 40:2.

As a matter of fact, Suetonius makes note of the bad omens that presented themselves on the very day of his being hailed emperor on October 13, A.D. 54. Suetonius speaks of Nero's effort to avoid their outcome by careful (superstitious) planning of his entrance: "When the death of Claudius was made public, Nero, who was seventeen years old, went forth to the watch between the sixth and seventh hour, since no earlier time for the formal beginning of his reign seemed suitable because of bad omens throughout the day. "[25] Could it not be that the concurrence of these pagan expectations from early in Nero's reign composed the fertile soil in which such a myth as before us could grow? *If* the myth is used by John in Revelation, could not John – either as a knowledgeable citizen, but especially as an inspired prophet! — have discerned such an early expectation in these portents as pre-indicators pointing his readers to the man Nero?

The Rapid Spread of the Myth

In the second place, the myth-rumor is known to have made its effects felt almost immediately upon Nero's death. This was probably in response to two factors: (1) his tyrannical reign, coupled with the human "fear of the worst" that his reign had bred in his citizens, and (2) the preparation for the myth by the above-mentioned harbingers. "In Asia the story of Nero's recovery was *common talk* as early as A.D. 69."[26]

Both Tacitus and Suetonius agree as to the early impact of the *Nero Redivivus* rumor. Just prior to Galba's murder early in A.D. 69, the following events occurred, according to Tacitus:

> About this time Achaia and Asia were terrified by a false rumour of Nero's arrival. The reports with regard to his death had been varied, and therefore many people imagined and believed that he was alive. The fortunes and attempts of other pretenders we shall tell as we proceed; but at this time, a slave from Pontus or, as others have reported, a freedman from Italy, who was skilled in playing on the cithara and in singing, gained the readier belief in his deceit through these accomplishments and his resemblance to Nero. He recruited some deserters, poor tramps whom he had bribed by great promises, and put to sea. A violent storm drove him to the island of Cythnus, where he called to his standard some soldiers who were returning from

25. Suetonius, *Nero* 8.
26. Swete, *Revelation*, p. cii.

> the East on leave, or ordered them to be killed if they refused. Then he robbed the merchants, and armed all the ablest-bodied of their slaves. A centurion, Sisenna, who was carrying clasped right hands, the symbol of friendship, to the praetorians in the name of the army in Syria, the pretender approached with various artifices, until Sisenna in alarm and fearing violence secretly left the island and made his escape. Then the alarm spread far and wide. Many came eagerly forward at the famous name, prompted by their desire for a change and their hatred of the present situation. The fame of the pretender was increasing from day to day when a chance shattered it.[27]

Several aspects of this record are of great interest. The foremost is that the effort to deceive on the basis of the myth was attempted, showing the currency of the myth early in A.D. 69.[28] The second is that the attempt was initially successful for a brief spell. The Parthians "were near to engaging in war, through the deception of a pretended Nero"![29] Another aspect worthy of note is that the myth caused terror in Asia, the very area to which John sent Revelation. Finally, Tacitus notes that "the alarm spread far and wide" and that "the fame of the pretender was increasing from day to day." Thus, here a significant and dangerous political and military impact is briefly made by the myth in the empire prior to A.D. 70.

Suetonius records that immediately after the death of Nero on June 9, A.D. 68, and for some time beyond, a number of people used to expect and were prepared for Nero's return: "Yet there were some who for a long time decorated his tomb with spring and summer flowers, and now produced his statues on the rostra in the fringed toga, and now his edicts, as if he were still alive and would shortly return and deal destruction to his enemies. "3°

If Revelation was written prior to A.D. 70 could not John have employed these things *ex concessis*? And since he was a prophet, could he not have made use of the coming widespread expectation? These considerations alone render the Nero *Redivivus* myth virtually useless as a tool to establishing a late date for Revelation.

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27. Tacitus, *Histories* 2:8.

28. Interestingly, but not convincingly, Weigall suggests of this episode that it may have been Nero himself! "It seems to me not at all impossible that he was really *Nero,* who had recovered from the wound ." (Arthur Weigall, Nero: *Emperor of Rome* [London: Butterworth, 1933], p. 298).

29. Tacitus, *Histories* 1:2.

30. Suetonius, *Nero* 57.

Early Date Refutation of the Myth

Despite the intriguing correspondences between the *Nero Redivivus* myth and several verses in Revelation, by no means is it a foregone conclusion that the two are related. The present writer at one time held to the early date Nero *Redivivus view* of Stuart, Russell, Farrar, and others on this matter. He has since come to reject it, however, for a more plausible understanding of the passages in question. The non-Nero *Redivivus* interpretive views of other competent early date advocates is superior in every respect to the one considered above.[31]

Galba as "Nero Redivivus"

One reasonable alternative interpretation of the relevant passages is the possibility that the sixth head's revival in the eighth head speaks merely of a *sensus* in which Nero lived again. That is, it could be that the slain head that died was in fact Nero, but that his return to life as the eighth head was not a literal, corporeal reappearance on the scene of history, but a moral and symbolical return. For instance, Revelation 17:10-11 reads: "and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction." Literally, the seventh emperor of Rome was Galba, who reigned only "a little while," i.e., from June, A.D. 68 to January 1, A.D. 69. The eighth emperor, however, was Otho. Suetonius tells us something of Otho that is of great interest if this interpretive route be taken. Upon presenting himself to the Senate and returning to the palace, it is said of Otho: "When in the midst of the other adulations of those who congratulated and flattered him, he was hailed by the common herd as Nero, he made no sign of dissent; on the contrary, according to some writers, he even made use of that surname in his commissions and his first letters to some of the governors of the provinces."[32] Tacitus, too, speaks of Otho's predilection for Nero: "It was believed that he also brought up the question of celebrating

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31. Diisterdieck, *Revelation,* pp. 371ff.; Schaff, *History* 1 :390ff.; F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xxix; David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), pp. 328ff.; Bernhard Weiss, *A Commentary on the New Testament,* 4 vols., trans. George H. Schodde and Epiphanies Wilson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906) 4:453ff.

32. Suetonius, *Otho 7.* .

Nero's memory with the hope of winning over the Roman people; and in fact some set up statues of Nero; moreover on certain days the people and soldiers, as if adding thereby to Otho's nobility and distinction, acclaimed him as Nero Otho."[33] Dio Cassius mentions the same idea: "But men did not fail to realize that his rule was sure to be even more licentious and harsh than Nero's. Indeed, he immediately added Nero's name to his own."[34]

Otho replaced the statues of Nero's wife, recalled Nero's procurators and freedman to their offices, "accepted the very title of 'Nero' bestowed upon him '*in flattery and as the highest honour*' by the lower classes, and even, according to a court historian, used this title in official dispatches [*sic*] to Spain. "[35]

The same was true of Vitellius, the ninth emperor, as well. Dio Cassius says that "Vitellius . . . delighted in and commended the name and the life and all the practices of Nero. "[36] Vitellius "imitated [Nero] closely, and greatly pleased the public by offering sacrifices to Nero's spirit in the Campus Martius, making all the priests and people attend."[37] Suetonius records this aspect of Vitellius's fascination with Nero: "And to leave no doubt in anyone's mind what model he chose for the government of the State, he made funerary offerings to Nero in the middle of the Campus Martius, attended by a great throng of the official priests."[38]

Thus, a case easily as credible as that drawn from the *Nero Redivivus* approach can be made for Nero's reliving in the adulation and actions of his predecessors. The major difficulty confronting this view is that it is not likely that such would cause the world to "wonder" after the Beast (Rev. 13:3). Of course, it could be that for both those who feared Nero, as well as those who loved him, there would be a strong element of "wonder" at the revivification of Nero's name and style. In light of Revelation 13:12 this view is particularly enhanced by the fact that Vitellius engaged in offering sacrifices to

33. Tacitus, *Histories* 1:78.

34. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 63.

35. Henderson, Nero, p. 418. See also discussion in Weigall, *Nero*, pp. 294ff.

36. Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 65:4.

37. Weigall, Nero, p. 300. See also Henderson, Nero, p. 418. Vitellius's fascination with Nero was so extensive that Vespasian had to make a determined effort to check the growth of the Nero cult when he came to power; Weigall, *Nero*, pp. 300ff.

38. Suetonius, *Vitellius* 11:2.

Nero's spirit and making all the priests and people attend.

Rome as "Nero Redivivus"

An even more compelling view, however, is available to the interpreter, one that is certainly to be preferred above either the Nero *Redivivus* or the approach just mentioned. The present writer is convinced that an extremely strong case can be made for an interpretation that meets all the requirements of the case and avoids the potentially rocky shoals of the implementation of a legend. The interpretation to be given is most *apropos*, not only in regard to one of the major events of the first century, but also to the theme of Revelation.

As we set forth this interpretation, it will be necessary to recall that John allows some shifting in his imagery of the Beast: the seven-headed Beast is here conceived generically as the Roman Empire, there specifically as one particular emperor. It is impossible to lock down the Beast imagery to either one referent or the other.[39] At some places the Beast has seven-heads that are seven kings collectively considered (Rev. 13: 1; Rev. 17:3, 9-10). Thus, he is generically portrayed as a kingdom with seven kings that arise in chronological succession (cf. Rev. 17:10- 11). But then again in the very same contexts the Beast is spoken of as an individual (Rev. 13:18), as but one head among the seven (Rev. 17: 11). This feature, as frustrating as it may be, is recognized by many commentators. It has already been demonstrated that the sixth head (Rev. 17: 10) that received the mortal wound (Rev. 13:1, 3) with a sword (Rev. 13:10, 14) and that was mysteriously numbered "666" (Rev. 13: 18) is Nero Caesar, the sixth emperor of Rome who died by a sword from his own hand.[40]

Recognizing this shifting referent takes one a long way toward

39. It is very interesting to note a related and remarkable feature in the Johannine methodology. John frequently gets his point across with double-meaning terms. Under his brief discussion of "Johannine Theology" Gundry writes of John's record of Jesus' teaching that the words "often carry second and even third meanings. 'Born again (or anew)' also means 'born from above' (3:3ff.), and the reference to Jesus' being 'lifted up' points not only to the method of His execution, but also to His resurrection and exaltation back to heaven (12:20-36, especially 32)." For an interesting discussion of this feature of John's style see Leon Morns, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids Eerdmans, 1971), "Introduction," and *ad. 10C.*

4s). Chap. 10.

resolving the interpretive issue before us. The mortal sword wound is to one of the heads (Rev. 13:3), and is a wound that apparently should have ended even the life of the Beast generically considered: for "the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast" (Rev. 13:3) after the wound was healed and the Beast continued alive. The seven-headed Beast seems. indestructible, for the cry goes up: "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" (Rev. 13:4).

At this point we need to reflect upon a most significant series of historical events in the first century. If our arguments regarding the appearance of Nero in Revelation commend themselves to the judicious mind, then a perfectly reasonable and historical – rather than legendary – explanation of the revived beast lies before the interpreter. When Nero committed suicide two major interrelated historical situations presented themselves to the world with catastrophic consequences: First, with the death of Nero the Julio-Claudian line of emperors perished from the earth. In superstitious, pagan fashion Suetonius notes that "many portents" foreshadowed the tragedy that was to be, i.e., that "the race of the Caesars ended with Nero."[41] The blood line that had given birth to, extended, stabilized, brought prosperity to, and had received worship, from the Roman Empire was cut off forever. "Upon the death of Nero on June 9, A.D. 68, the first line of Roman Emperors, that of the 'Julio-Claudian' House, became extinct. Whatever the demerit of its Princes may have been, their continuity of descent at least preserved the Roman Empire from the horrors of civil war."[42] Thus, "through the death of the last Emperor from the original imperial Julian family, namely Nero, it seemed as though the old imperial power had received its death-blow."[43] By itself, the cessation of the famed Julio-Claudian line would have caused dismay among the citizens of the empire. But this event does not stand alone.

Second, following the death of Nero and the extinction of the Julian House, the Roman Empire was hurled into a civil war of such ferocity and proportions that it almost destroyed the empire, seriously threatening to reduce even "eternal Rome" to rubble. This

41. Suetonius, *Galba* 1.

42. B. W. Henderson, *Five* Roman Emperors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 1.

43. Weiss, *Commentary* 4453.

well-known fact[44] is of tremendous importance in first century world history. Were the book of Revelation written during Nero's reign and in regard to the Neronic evils, as the wealth of evidence presented demands, we should expect that prophetic allusions to Rome's Civil War would appear.

In introducing the days following the death of Nero and the beginning the ascension of Galba, Tacitus writes:

> The history on which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars and often both at the same time. There was success in the East [i.e., the Jewish War], misfortune in the West. Illyricum was disturbed, the Gallic provinces wavering, Britain subdued and immediately let go. The Sarmatae and Suebi rose against us; the Dacians won fame by defeats inflicted and suffered; even the Parthians were almost roused to arms through the trickery of a pretended Nero. Moreover, Italy was distressed by disasters unknown before or returning after the lapse of ages. . . . Rome was devastated by conflagrations, in which her most ancient shrines were consumed and the very Capitol fired by citizens' hands. Sacred rites were defiled; there were adulteries in high places. The sea was filled with exiles, its cliffs made foul with the bodies of the dead. In Rome there was more awful cruelty. High birth, wealth, the refusal or acceptance of office – all gave ground for accusations, and virtues caused the surest ruin. The rewards of the informers were no less hateful than their crimes; for some, gaining priesthoods and consulships as spoils, others, obtaining positions as imperial agents and secret influence at court, made havoc and turmoil everywhere, inspiring hatred and terror. Slaves were corrupted against their masters, freedmen against their patrons; and those who had no enemy were crushed by their friends. . . . Besides the manifold misfortunes that befell mankind, there were prodigies in the sky and on the earth, warnings given by thunderbolts, and prophecies of the future, both joyful and gloomy, uncertain and clear. For never was it more fully proved by awful disasters of the Roman people or by indubitable signs that gods care not for our safety, but for our punishment.[45]

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44. As Josephus notes of the Roman civil wars of this era "I have omitted to give an exact account of them, because they are well known by all, and they are described by a great number of Greek and Roman authors" (*Wars* 4:9:2).

45. Tacitus, *Histories* 1:2-3.

Although some of the details of this lamentation reach beyond the Roman Civil War era of A.D. 68-69, most of it focuses on just that era and relates the very events of that upheaval. Tacitus's detailed account of the ruin wreaked upon Rome almost equals in psychological horror and cultural devastation that which befell Jerusalem during the Jewish War as recorded by Josephus. Surely the Roman Civil War (or, more literally, Civil Wars) was the "firstfruits of Nero's death."%

These civil wars would, to all appearance, strike the citizens of the empire – Christian and pagan alike – as being the very death throes of Rome. Indeed, in Tacitus's estimation it very nearly was so: "This was the condition of the Roman state when Serius Galba, chosen consul for the second time, and his colleague Titus Vinius entered upon the year that was to be for Galba his last and@ *the state almost the end. "4*[7] The seven-headed Beast (Rome), before the world's startled eyes, was toppling to its own death as its sixth head (Nero) was mortally wounded. As Suetonius viewed the long months immediately following Nero's death, the empire "for a long time had been unsettled, and as it were, drifting, through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors."4[8] Josephus records the matter as perceived by Titus and Vespasian while they were engaged in the Jewish War in A.D. 69: "And now they were both in suspense about the public affairs, the Roman empire being then in a fluctuating condition, and did not go on with their expedition against the Jews, but thought that to make any attack upon a foreigner was now unseasonable, on account of the solicitude they were in for their own country."[49]

According to the pseudo-prophecy of 4 Ezra (or 2 Esdras) 12:16-19, written around A.D. 100 (thirty years after the events[50]), the Empire[51] was "in danger of falling": "This is the interpretation of the twelve wings which you saw. As for your hearing a voice that spoke, coming not from the eagle's heads but from the midst of his body,

46. Henderson, *Five Roman Emperors,* p. 87.

47. Tacitus, *Histories* 1:11. Emphasis mine.

48. Suetonius, *Vespasian* 1:1.

49. Josephus, *Wars* 4:9:2.

50. Bruce Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra," in James H. Charlesworth, cd., Old *Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2* vols (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983) 1:520.

51. Metzger, in agreement with almost all pseudepigraphical scholars, notes that "The eagle, Ezra is told, represents the Roman Empire, which will be punished by God's Messiah for persecuting his elect (12: 10-34)"(*ibid.*, p. 517).

this is the interpretation: in the midst of the time of that kingdom great struggles shall arise, and it shall be in danger of falling; nevertheless it shall not fall then, but shall regain its former power." Josephus, a Jew from the province that included Israel, agrees that during this time Rome was brought near to utter "ruin."[52] He notes that "about this time it was that heavy calamities came about Rome on all sides."[53] The reports of the destruction and rapine were so horrible that it is reported of General Vespasian: "And as this sorrow of his was violent, he was not able to support the torments he was under, nor to apply himself further in other wars when his native country was laid waste."[54] Josephus writes elsewhere that "the Roman government [was] in a great internal disorder, by the continual changes of its rulers, and [the Germans] understood that every part of the habitable earth under them was in an unsettled and tottering condition. "[55] Men everywhere understood that "the state of the Remans was so ill."[56]

But what eventually occurred at the end of these "death throes"? The rest of Suetonius's quotation begun above informs us that "the empire, which for a long time had been unsettled and, as it were, drifting through the usurpation and violent death of three emperors, was at last taken in and given stability by the Flavian family."[57] Josephus concurs with this view of things when he writes: "So upon this confirmation of Vespasian's entire government, which was now settled, and upon *the unexpected deliverance of the public affairs of the Remans from ruin,* Vespasian turned his thoughts to what remained unsubdued in Judea. "[58] Thus, after a time of grievous Civil War, the Empire was revived by the ascending of Vespasian to the purple.

> Through the death of the last Emperor from the original imperial Julian family, namely Nero, it seemed as though the old imperial power had received its death-blow. In the times of the so-called Interregnum new Emperors were constantly trying to secure the throne, but not one could secure a permanent or generally recognized

52. Josephus, *Wars* 4:11:5.
53. *Ibid.*, 410:1.
54. *Ibid., 4102.*
55. *Ibid.* 7:4:2.
56. *Ibid.* 7:4:2
57. *Vespasian* 1:1.
58. *Wars* 411:5. Emphasis mine.

> authority. Thereupon, by the fact that Vespasian was made Emperor and in an orderly manner was confirmed by the Senate, the moral wound of the beast is healed and in the new imperial family of the Flavians the Roman Empire is restored in its old and firm power.[59]

A number of celebrated scholars (e.g., Schaff and Dusterdieck),[60] view the matter thus, including some even of the late date school (e.g., Caird and Moffatt).[61] Moffatt is a particularly interesting case in point. He attempts to hold to the best of both worlds, as it were, when he writes at Revelation 13:3: "The allusion is . . . to the terrible convulsions which in 69 A.D. shook the empire to its foundations (Tat. *Hist. i.* 11). Nero's death with the bloody interregnum after it, was a wound to the State, from which it only recovered under Vespasian."[62] To discover such a vigorous late date advocate and *Nero Redivivus* enthusiast admitting that the references can be applied to the Roman Civil War and Rome's revival under Vespasian, is to discover a telling admission. If the verses in Revelation can properly be understood as making reference to the earth-shaking historical events of the era, why would any commentator be driven to employ a myth to make sense of the passages? And this being the case, how can the myth be used as a major dating datum from the internal evidence? If such a vigorous, liberal advocate of the Domitianic date as Moffatt is willing to allow such, why should not the more cautious, evangelical scholars allow it?

The reference to the "eighth" king (Rev. 17:11) might seem a difficulty for this view. This is because the eighth emperor of Rome was actually Otho, the second of the interregnum rulers, and not Vespasian, who actually gave life again to the Empire. Exegetically it should be noted that in the chronological line of the seven heads/kings, John speaks of the matter with exactness by use of the definite article. That is, he writes in Revelation 17:10 (we translate it literally): "*the* [*oi*] *five* fell, *the* [d] one is, *the* [*o*] other not yet come, and whenever he comes a little time it behooves him to remain." But the definite article is conspicuously absent in the reference to the eighth

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59. Weiss, *Commentary* 4453-454.

60. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, 8* vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1950) 1:390, 428Düsterdieck, Revelation, pp. 374-375.

61. G. B. Caird, *A Commentary* on *the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New* York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 164; Moffatt, *Revelation,* p. 430.

62. *Ibid.*, p. *430.*

head/king in Revelation 17:11: "And the beast which was and is not, even he is *an* eighth." Of course, there is no indefinite article in Greek, but the omission of the definite article that clearly and repetitively defined the chronological series of head/kings ("*the* five," "*the* one," "*the* one to come") vanishes before the eighth is mentioned. Thus, the eighth is "*an* eighth," i.e., it refers not to any one particular individual, but to the revival of the Empire itself as the heads are beginning to be replaced. The Roman Empire which will later revive its persecuting relationship to Christianity in its revived form is arising from ruin.

There is a very important sense in which the revival of the Empire under Vespasian, was a revival under "an eighth," who is "of the seven." It is the same Roman Empire that is brought to life from the death of Civil War. John's concern is particularly with the contemporaneous events, i.e., here the Roman Civil War that occurred within the compass of the reign of the seven kings. The eighth is beyond his most pressing and immediate concern (although it is not unimportant), and thus is not specified and detailed.[63] The fact that this revival is of an eighth head, however, indicates the rapid recovery of the Beast.[64] That recovery will come shortly after the demise of the original seven.

Conclusion

The revival of the Beast is a remarkable and significant aspect of Revelation's message. Although late date advocacy presents an intriguing argument based on this phenomenon, in the final analysis it fails of its purpose. Even if the Nero Legend were in John's mind, its seeds were planted early in Nero's reign and its first appearance as a powerful influence in civil affairs occurred in A.D. 69.

More importantly, a reasonable and persuasive case can be

63. Chilton has perceptively noted that the number eight is that of resurrection, for Jesus was resurrected on the eighth day, i.e., Sunday. He alludes to its significance here in showing the revival of Roman tyranny which is to come. See Chilton, Days *of Vengeance*, p. 436. See also E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (London: Samuel Baxter and Sons, rep. 1970), appendix 10,

64. The dispensationalist recognizes the importance of the fall of Rome in Revelation. But rather than seeing it as contemporaneous with the life of John and the original recipients of his book, he sees it as the fall of Rome a few hundred years later and followed millennia later by a "revived Roman Empire." See for instance John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), p. 9.

made for a view of the relevant passages that avoids all reference to the Nero *Redivivus* myth. The earth-shaking events associated with the death of Nero and the eventual ascension of Vespasian easily fulfill the prophecies ofJohn. In light of such a plausible view, the objection against the early date on the basis of the myth must be wholly removed.

19

THE CONDITION OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

The final pro-Domitianic argument from the internal evidence that we will consider is that which is drawn from the epistolary preface to Revelation. It is averred by many that the Seven Letters to the churches of Asia contain historical allusions demanding a late date. Turning our attention again to the order of argument given by Morris, we cite his fourth objection to the early date: "A further indication is that the churches of Asia Minor seem to have a period of development behind them. This would scarcely have been possible at the time of the Neronic persecution, the only serious competitor in date to the Domitianic period. "[1] Guthrie also lists this as his fourth argument, and confidently so. After expressing some hesitancy in employing the Nero *Redivivus* myth, he notes of the present argument that here "we are on firmer ground" due to "certain positive indications of internal conditions" indicated in the letters.[2] This line of reasoning is cited as Swete's first point in establishing the late date from internal considerations;[3] it appears as the second argument in Charles, Moffatt, and Mounce (among his minor arguments), and third in Kümmel.[4]

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1. Leon Morns, *The Revelation of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 37.

2. Donald Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 954.

3. Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1906] 1977), pp. c-ci.

4. R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John, 2* vols. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 1 :xciv; James Moffatt, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in W. R. Nicoll, cd., *Englishman's Greek Testament, vol. 5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rep. 19S0), p. 316; Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th ed., trans. Howard C. Kee (Nashville Abingdon, 1973), p. 469; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 34.

The data discerned from this perspective is almost universally employed among late date advocates. Although there is a wide variety of approaches constructed from the material of the Seven Letters, only the more solid evidences will be tested at this juncture. We will show that none of the arguments is detrimental to early date advocacy. In keeping with the approach utilized throughout this section of our work, we will follow the order found in Morris's work on Revelation.

The Wealth of the Church in Laodicea (Rev. 3: 17)

Revelation 3:17 reads:

> Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Morris notes that in the Laodicean letter "we are told that the church in Laodicea was 'rich, and increased with goods' (iii. 17). But as the city was destroyed by an earthquake in A.D. 60/61 this must have been considerably later."5 Mounce and Kümmel also endorse this observation, a major component of the complex of evidence derived from the Seven Letters.[6]

It is true that Laodicea was destroyed by an earthquake about this time; the evidence for both the fact of the earthquake and its date are clear from Tacitus.7 The idea behind the argument is that such a devastating event as an earthquake must necessarily have severe and long term economic repercussions on the community. And in such a community, the minority Christians could be expected to have suffered, perhaps even disproportionately. If Revelation were written sometime in the period from A.D. 64-70, it would seem to Morris, Mounce, and others, that the time-frame would be too compressed to allow for the enrichment of the church at Laodicea, as is suggested in Revelation. But by the time of Domitian a few decades later, such

5. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37.

6. Mounce, Revelation, p. 35 and Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 469.

7. Tacitus, *Annals* 1427. Most scholars accept the dating from Tacitus. Eusebius (Chronicle *64)* and Orosius speak of it as occurring after the fire that destroyed Rome in A.D. 64, according to C. J. Hemer, *A Study of the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia with Special Reference to Their Local Background* (Manchester: unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, 1969), p. 417; cited in Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 123, n. 31.

an enrichment of the church would not be difficult to imagine.

Despite the *prima facie* plausibility of this argument it does not carry sufficient weight to serve as an anchor for the late date theory. Some suspicion is immediately cast on the argument when it is noted that it is avoided by such noteworthy late date advocates as conservative scholars Swete and Guthrie, and such liberal proponents as Charles and Moffatt.[8] The refusal of these scholars to make reference to this argument is not necessarily destructive to the cause, of course. But it is at least curious that such vigorous liberal and conservative advocates do not deem it to be of merit.

The Nature of the "Riches"

We should note also that it may be that the reference to "riches" made by John is a reference to spiritual riches, and not to material wealth at all.

> These riches and other goods in which the Laodicean Church and Angel gloried we must understand as *spiritual* riches in which they fondly imagined they abounded. . . . [T]his language in this application is justified by numerous passages in Scripture: as by Luke xii. 21; 1 Cor. i:5; 2 Cor. viii. 9; above all, by two passages of holy irony, 1 Cor. iv. 8 and Hos. xii. 8; both standing in very closest connexion with this; I can indeed hardly doubt that there is intended a reference to the latter of these words of our Lord. The Laodicean Angel, and the church he was drawing into the same ruin with himself, were walking in a vain show and imagination of their own righteousness, their own advances in spiritual insight and knowledge.[9]

A good number of commentators suggest allusion here to 1 Corinthians 4:8 and Hosea 12:8. Additional passages such as Luke 18:11, 12; 16: 15; and 1 Corinthians 13:1 can be consulted as well. If this interpretation of "riches" in Revelation 3:17 is valid, then the entire force of this argument is dispelled. Surprisingly, this is even the view of Mounce: "The material wealth of Laodicea is well established. The huge sums taken from Asian cities by Roman officials during the Mithridatic period and following indicate enormous wealth. . . . The 'wealth' claimed by the Laodicean church, however, was not

8. See references to their works cited above.

9. R. C. Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to t/u Seven Churches*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1883), p. 210.

material but spiritual. . . . [T]he Laodiceans felt they were secure in their spiritual attainment ." [10]

The Ease of the Recovery

In addition, there is the impressive historical evidence of the situation that tends to undermine the rationale of the argument, even if material riches are in view. Most ruinous to the entire argument is the documented fact of Laodicea's apparently effortless, unaided, and rapid recovery from the earthquake. Tacitus reports that the city did not even find it necessary to apply for an imperial subsidy to help them rebuild, even though such was customary for cities in Asia Minor. As Tacitus records it, Laodicea "arose from the ruins by the strength of her own resources, and with no help from us. " [11] This is as clear a statement as is necessary to demonstrate that Laodicea's economic strength was not radically diminished by the quake. Despite the quake, economic resources were so readily available within Laodicea that the city could easily recover itself from the damage. Interestingly, both Morris and Mounce make reference to this statement by Tacitus, despite their using the argument to demand a late date. [12]

Furthermore, it would seem that the time element would not be extremely crucial for "earthquakes were very frequent thereabouts, and rebuilding doubtless followed at once. " [13] The quake occurred in A.D. 61; if Revelation were written as early as A.D. 65 or early A.D. 66 (as is likely), that would give four years for rebuilding. We must remember that the recovery was self-generated. Simple economic analysis demands that for the resources to survive, rebuilding would have to be rapid.

The Epicenter of the Quake

In addition, who is to say that the Christian community was

10. Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 126. This is not the first time that Mounce employs an argument in his introduction that he fails to follow through adequately in his commentary. See our observations in Chap. 18 on his contradictory treatment of the Nero *Redivivus* myth. It would seem most reasonable to expect that if the argument in his introduction is to be given weight, it must not be allowed to shift its meaning in the commentary.

11. Tacitus, *Annals 1427.*

12. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 123.

13. F. J. A. Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John: I-III* (London: Macmillan, 1908), p. xx. See Strabo (64 B.C. – A.D. 19), *Geographic* 12:8; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 54:30.

necessarily overwhelmed by the quake in that city? After all, in the Revelation 3:17 statement it is the *church* that is in view, not the city. Even the horribly destructive earthquakes in Mexico City on September 19 and 20 of 1985 did not destroy every sector of the city. Perhaps, by the grace of God, the Christians were in areas less affected by the quake, as Israel was in an area of Egypt unaffected by the plagues (Ex. 8:22; 9:4, 6, 24; 10:23; 11:27). Would this token of God's providence lead the Laodiceans to a too proud confidence in their standing as in Revelation 3:17? Perhaps a roughly analogous situation is found with the situation at Corinth, which Paul set about to correct (1 Cor. 4:6-8).

The first argument from the Seven Letters is less than convincing.

The Existence of the Church in Smyrna

Morris's second evidence from the Seven Letters is that "the church at Smyrna seems not to have been in existence in the days of Paul."[14] Obviously, if the church mentioned in Revelation 2:8-11 did not exist until after Paul's death it would have to have been founded *later* than A.D. 67 or 68. This would push the dates forward too far to allow any view of Revelation's dating that precedes A.D. 67 or 68 – although it would not necessarily affect a date after A.D. 68 and well before A.D. 95.

This late date objection is founded on the well-known statement in a letter written to the church at Philippi by Polycarp: "But I have not found any such thing in you [i.e., the church at Philippi], neither have heard thereof, among whom the blessed Paul labored, who were his letters in the beginning. For he boasteth of you in all those churches which alone at that time knew God; for we knew him not as yet."[15] Polycarp (c. A.D. 69-155), bishop of the church at Smyrna, is thought to have been a disciple of John the Apostle. He seems to refer here to the Smyrnaean church when he writes "we knew him not as yet ."[16] This may mean: our church at Smyrna was not yet

14. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37.

15. Polycarp, *Letter to the Philippians* 11:3.

16. The original Greek statement of Polycarp does not specifically use the word "Smymaeans," which so many translators place into the text. See J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers, 2* vols. (London: Macmillan, 1889) 2:926, or the Latin manuscript in J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Hermer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1891] 1984),

founded. Charles and Moffatt deem this to be the most substantial of the arguments drawn from the contents of the Seven Letters.'7 Charles makes much of this argument, which is the only one from the Seven Letters material that he presses into service in his section on the date of Revelation:

> The Church of Smyrna did not exist in 60-64 A.D. – at a time when St. Paul was boasting of the Philippians in all the Churches. Cf. Polycarp (*Ad Phil . . .)*. But though Polycarp's letter tells us that the Church of Smyrna was not founded in 60-64 A. D., he gives no hint as to when it was founded. Hence several years may have elapsed after that date before it was founded. When, however, we turn to Rev. 2:8-11 we find that our text presupposes a Church poor in wealth but rich in good works, with a development of apparently many years to its credit. This letter, then, may have been written in the closing years of Vespasian (75-79) but hardly earlier. . . . The natural conclusion, therefore, is that though our author wrote the Letters in the reign of Vespasian, he re-edited them in the closing years of Domitian for incorporation in his Book.[18]

Guthrie reckons this approach by Charles as having "considerable weight, " although he points out that Feine and Behm "are very cautious on this point. "[19] It appears as Moffatt's second argument for a late date[20] and has found currency in a host of scholarly works.[21]

The Interpretive Problem

We should note that scholarly objections even from more liberal

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p. 172. This may or may not be a part of the problem; early date advocates Lightfoot and Robinson do not express any reservations with understanding the pronoun to refer to the Smyrnaeans. Light foot, *Apostolic Fathers,* 2:927. John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 229.

17. Charles, *Revelation,* 1 :xciv; James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. &T. Clark, 1911), p. 507.

18. Charles, *Revelation, 1* :xciv.

19. Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 954 n. 6,955.

20. Moffatt, *Revelation,* p. 317.

21. See in addition to Morns, Mounce, Guthrie, Charles, and Moffatt, mentioned heretofore: Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament, 3rd* ed., trans. John Moore Trout, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909) 3:412ff,; A. H. McNeile, *An Introduction to the Study of the New Testament,* revised by C. S. C. Williams (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), p. 262; Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1917] 1967), p. 207; and Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 469.

authors have been lodged against the interpretation of Polycarp's statement cited above. It is not at all necessary that Polycarp's statement be interpreted in the manner that Charles and Moffatt do – an interpretation that supposes the church to have been *founded* after Paul's death. Torrey is dogmatically opposed to the approach of Charles and Moffatt: "Polycarp, moreover, is misquoted. He is merely complimenting the Philippians church on its very early reputation. He refers expressly to the beginning of Paul's Epistle (Phil. 1:5), and adds: We, the church of Smyrna did not exist at the time when you of Philippi were already praised by Paul, as he went about among the earliest churches (referring to Phil. 4:5f.)."[22] Robinson is just as certain as to the precariousness of the argument from Polycarp as Morris, Charles, Moffatt, and others are of its usefulness:

> One objection however can be dismissed, which is constantly repeated from one writer to another. This is that Polycarp in his epistle to the Philippians (11 .3) states that his own church at Smyrna had not been founded till after the death of Paul – so that it could not therefore be addressed as it is in Rev. 2.8-11 as early as the late 60s. But, as Lightfoot observed long ago, all that Polycarp actually says is that "the Philippians were converted to the Gospel before the Smyrnaens – a statement which entirely accords with the notices of the two churches in the New Testament." It is astonishing that so much has continued to be built on so little.[23]

The Evangelization of Smyrna

As seems likely, "Smyrna must have been evangelized very soon after Ephesus, see Acts 19:10, 26; that is, *before* the year *60."*[24] The Acts account emphasizes in conjunction with Paul's labors in Ephesus, that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus," and that "in almost all of Asia" Paul was making progress in the promotion of the Gospel. If it were the case that the Smyrnaens were evangelized not very long after the Ephesians — and what is unreasonable in such a supposition, in light of Acts 19? — then there is ample time for a situation as presupposed in John's letter to Smyrna in Revelation to have transpired.

The extreme difficulty of dating Paul's epistle to the Philippians

22. Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocalypse of John* (New Haven: Yale, 1958), p. 78.
23. Robinson, *Redating*, pp. 229-230.
24. Torrey, *Apocalypse*, p. 78.

should be understood as impacting on the question arising from consideration of Polycarp's letter. Both Guthrie and Hendriksen find it necessary to employ ten pages of intricate (and inconclusive!) argument to arrive at a possible date for the writing of the canonical Philippians epistle toward the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment. This imprisonment is mentioned in Acts, and occurred around A.D. 63. Müller expends seven pages to arrive at the same conclusion.[25] J. B. Lightfoot and H. C. G. Moule held to an earlier date toward the beginning of his captivity; this would yield a date of around A.D. 61.[26] Kümmel and Robinson, as well as a number of others, hold to an Ephesian provenance for the epistle, which would place it as early as A.D. 53, but certainly no later than A.D. 58.[27] Guthrie even notes that "there is a much greater inclination to attribute Philippians than the other Captivity Epistles to Ephesus" among modern scholars.[28] Scott deems the arguments supportive of an Ephesian provenance to be "of peculiar force. "[29]

These dates for the writing of Paul's epistle to the Philippians — particularly the two earlier possibilities — provide ample time for the Philippians letter to have preceded even the founding of the Smyrnaean church. This is particularly significant if it is argued that the Philippians letter itself must precede the founding of the church of Smyrna, and not just the founding of the Philippians church.

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25. Jac J. Müller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon. New* International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 21-28. See also: Guthrie, *Introduction,* pp. 526-536 and William Hendriksen, *Philippians. New* Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), pp. 21-31.

26. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, rep. 1953), pp. 30ff. H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1893] 1977), p. 19. In agreement also is Samuel A. Cartledge, *A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1938), pp. 111-112.

27. Kümmel, *Introduction,* pp. 324-332; Robinson, *Redating,* p. *61;* Leander E. Keck "The Letter of Paul to the Philippians" in Charles M. Laymen, cd., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary* on *the Bible* (Nashville: Ahingdon, 1971), p. 846; and Otto F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus (New* Rochelle, NY: Caratzas Bros., 1979), pp. 79-86. See also G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry (New* York: Scribners, 1930), pp. 100ff.; D. T. Rowlingson *Anglican Theological Remew 32 (1950): 1-7.* Duncan (*Expository Times* 67:6 [March 1956]) cites the following as supportive of the possibility of the Ephesian provenance of the letter: A. H. McNeile, Kirsopp Lake, F. B. Clogg, F. F. Bruce, J. H. Michael, M. Dibelius, P. Bonnard, P. Benoit, P. Feine and J. Behm, Albertz, and W. Michaelis.

28. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. *531.*

29. Ernest Findlay Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament.* Records of Civilization 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 189.

Furthermore, this allows more than enough time to meet the conditions of the church at Smyrna evidenced in John's letter. After all, how much time is necessary to demonstrate a zealous faith adorned with good works? There really seems to be no necessity for presupposing a late date for Revelation based on the letter to Smyrna and Polycarp's letter to the Philippians.

The Spiritual Decline in Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea

The most familiar of the evidences from the Seven Letters is that derived from warnings of spiritual decline in at least three of the churches: Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. The relevant verses from Revelation are:

> But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first (To Ephesus, Rev. 2:4, 5).
>
> You have a name that you are alive, and you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God (To Sardis, Rev. 3:1c-2).
>
> I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I would that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, " and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich (To Laodicea, Rev. 3:15-18a).

The utility of this evidence for the affirmation of a late date for Revelation is expressed by Morris: "All the churches in chapters ii and iii appear to have had a period of history. Especially is this the case with those of whom things could be said like 'thou hast left thy first love' (ii. 4) ."[30] Swete comments in the same vein: "The condition of the Asian Churches, as it is described in cc. ii., iii., is that of a period considerably later than the death of Nero. Their inner life has undergone many changes since St Paul's ministry at Ephesus, and even since the writing of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians and

30. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 37.

the two Epistles to Timothy. Deterioration has set in at Ephesus, and at Sardis and Laodicea faith is dying or dead."[31] Morns, Swete, and others argue that the supposed magnitude of the spiritual decline manifested in the churches, evidenced in John's admonitions, demands a period of time more readily available if John wrote during Domitian's reign, than if he wrote during Nero's.[32] It would seem a reasonable expectation that the early fervency of a new-found faith would wane only after the passing of various perils over an extended period of time.

Despite all the seemingly credible assertions advanced toward the establishment of the above argument, however, at least two important counter considerations militate against any confident acceptance of them.

Time Required for Spiritual Decline

First, granting that there is "a marked deterioration"[33] in the churches, the whole question of the length of time necessary for such a waning of faith lies at the heart of the situation. Though it is quite reasonable to expect that a passage of time is best suited to a decline of a newborn faith, surely the passage of time is not a *sine qua non* for such. In fact, a classic illustration of a rapid decline is contained in the New Testament itself.

In Galatians 5:7 Paul writes to the Galatians that initially "you were running well." The very purpose of Paul's letter, however, is to deal with the rapid decline of the apostolic faith among those in the congregation: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7). The inspired apostle considers the congregation to be "deserting" Christ. And this desertion of the faith was occurring "quickly."

Consider also Paul's concern over the multitude of troubles within the church of Corinth, a church founded in A.D. 49 and to which he wrote with heavy heart in A.D. 57. Indeed, Paul anticipated such problems to be experienced among the churches virtually as soon as

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31. Swete, *Revelation,* pp. c-ci.

"32. Morris, *Revelation,* p. 37; Mounce, *Revelation,* p. 34; Swete, *Revelation,* pp. c-ci; Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 954.

33. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 954.

he left the scene (Acts 20:29ff). Was not Timothy urged to remain at Ephesus because of the entry of false doctrine within Paul's lifetime (1 Tim. 1 :6)? Paul also experienced distressing defections from fidelity to him as a servant of Christ within his ministry (2 Tim. 4). He felt the particularly sharp pang caused by the desertion of Demas (2 Tim. 4: 10). Paul seems to be concerned with the labors of Archippus at Laodicea (one of the churches in question) when he warns him to "take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it" (Col. 4:16-17).34 As Lightfoot notes on this particular matter:

> Some signs of slackened zeal seem to have called forth this rebuke. It may be an accidental coincidence, but it is at least worthy of notice, that lukewarmness is the special sin denounced in the angel of the Laodiceans, and that the necessity of greater earnestness is the burden of the message to that Church. As with the people, so it is with the priest. The community takes its colour from and communicates its colour to its spiritual rulers. The "be zealous" of St John is the counterpart to the "take heed" of St Paul.[35]

How much more would such a problem be aggravated by the political circumstances generated from the initiation of the Neronic persecution in A.D. 64!

Because of such examples as those found in Paul's writings, Kümmel makes no reference to the argument from the spiritual condition of the churches.[36] Moffatt even suggests its avoidance because of the slippery nature of the matter: "The religious development of the churches is often held to presuppose a considerable length of time, but this argument must be used with caution. Worldliness and error and uncharitable feelings did not require decades to spring up in the primitive churches of Asia Minor and elsewhere. No great stress can be laid on this feature. "[37] Guthrie, though he employs the

34. A few examples of commentators who see the statement regarding Archippus as an admonition include: J. B. Light foot, *St Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1879] 1959), pp. 42-43; Trench, *Commentary*, p. 200; William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon, New* Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), p. 198; H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, [1893] 1977), p. 144.

35. Light foot, *Colossians and Philemon*, pp. 42-43. Light foot's comparison of Paul's and John's labors in Asia is most enlightening, pp. 41ff.

36. Kümmel, *Introduction,* p. 469.

37. Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 318.

argument, states that the argument "could be disputed."[38]

The Problem with the Domitianic View

Second, it must be noted that except for the matter of time, the Domitianic date is not necessarily any more conducive to the decline than the Neronic. That is, late date advocates have John on the scene with these seven churches for over twenty-five years, but still they declined. It is not as if (on the late date view) the churches have been left without apostolic oversight. Both the early and late date views face the same "problem" in this regard.

There does not seem to be any compelling reason to reject the early date of Revelation on the basis of the spiritual decline in certain of the Seven Churches.

Conclusion

Although there are other arguments that have been drawn from the Seven Letters, those presented are the leading ones. A careful consideration of the merits of each of the arguments, however, demonstrates their inconclusive nature. Not one of the arguments considered individually, nor all of them considered collectively, compel acceptance of the Domitianic date of Revelation. This is made all the more serious when their inconclusive nature is contrasted with the wealth of other internal considerations for an early date, as rehearsed heretofore in the present work.

The Seven Letters even have elements more suggestive of a period of time prior to the destruction of the Temple. A major one of these has been discussed previously: the presence of strong Jewish elements in the churches. This feature bespeaks an early period of Christian development prior to the cleavage between Jew and Christian, which was enforced by the complex of events associated with both the Neronic persecution and the Jewish War (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).[39]

38. Guthrie, *Introduction,* p. 955,

39. *See* Chap. 13 above. An interesting and reasonable conjecture regarding the derivation of the name "Nicolaitan" (Rev. 2:6, 15) has enjoyed wide currency, and is also subtly suggestive of the early date of Revelation in that it bespeaks an era prior to the final separation of Christianity from Judaism. That is, that the name "Nicolaitan" is intentionally derived from the Greek (*νικᾶ* and *λαόν*) which means "conqueror of people," and as such reflects the Hebrew term "Baalam" (from בלע and עם), which means "destruction of the people." This indicates John is giving a Greek designation to the Hebrew word, as he does elsewhere in Revelation (e.g., 9: 11; 16: 16; cf. 12:9; 20:2).

Another important factor involves John's exhortation to the churches in anticipation of the "judgment coming" of Christ (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3, 10). There are no events that could be expected soon in Domitian's day that approached the magnitude and significance – both culturally and theologically – of the Neronic persecution of Christianity, the destruction of Judaism's temple, and the near demise of Rome in the Civil Wars of A.D. 68-69.[40] The early date stands, despite the presumed objections on the foregoing bases.

Just as John called Jerusalem "Sodom and Egypt" (Rev. 11:8), here he calls the Judaizers "Nicolaitans" (or "Baalamites"). As Stuart noted, "It was common among the early Hebrew Christians, to give persons of Hebrew origin a Greek name corresponding in sense with their Hebrew one," e.g., Peter and Dorcas (Moses Stuart, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. [Andover: Allen, Merrill, and Wardwell, 1945] 2:64). See:

Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, 3rd cd., trans. Henry E. Jacobs (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1886), pp. 134ff.

James M. Macdonald, *The Life and Writings of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877), p. 155.

J. L. Ratton, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1912), p. 143ff.

Charles, *Revelation 1:52-53.*

Trench, *Commentary*, p. 90.

Morris, Revelation, pp. 61-62.

Moffatt, *Revelation*, p. 352 (he adds to the list: Ewald, Hengstenberg, Schürer, Jülicher, and Bousset).

40. See Chap. 9 above.

PART V

CONCLUSION

20

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the field of New Testament Introduction there are a number of thorny questions that confront the scholar. The great distance in time and culture separating us from first century Christian and imperial history has served to render the questions that would naturally arise even more difficult. Yet for a more precise understanding of the whole meaning of Scripture, it is necessary for dedicated Christian scholarship to attempt to resolve them. The more certain we are regarding the circumstances of the human authors and the original recipients of Scripture, the better will be our position to discern the fullness of the meaning of Scripture itself.

The field of Biblical Introduction is, therefore, a worthy enterprise for the conservative Christian scholar, who is committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as He is revealed in God's holy Word. The diligent labors of these scholars actually serve to bring the people of God further along in their sanctification, if we truly believe that we are sanctified by God's Word, which is truth (John 17: 17; 2 Tim. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:2).

One of the most debated of questions in the field of New Testament Introduction is that which comprises the topic of this book: What is the date of the composition of Revelation? The matter has been debated since the rise of the modern principles of scientific Introduction. And the passage of time has witnessed a frequent shifting back and forth on the answer to the question. The most widely held view among current Christian scholarship – whether liberal or conservative – is that of a Domitianic date for the book around A.D. 95. Unfortunately, there are numerous problems of consequence that beset this view.

A Summation of the Early Date Argument

In attempting to demonstrate the proper dating of this most influential book of our sacred canon, our investigation carefully considered both the external and internal witness of Revelation. Although much weight has long been credited the external evidence, especially that associated with Irenaeus, we noted that such a procedure is in danger of quieting the voice of God in deference to the voice of man. That is, when engaged from the perspective of an unflinching commitment to Scripture as the Word of God, it should be the procedure of Biblical Introduction to allow the most weight to the Scripture's *self-testimony* regarding its own historical composition. In deference to common practice, however, and in light of the nature of the present work as largely concerned with a rebuttal to the current late date position, we began with an inquiry into the external considerations of tradition.

The External Witness

In the portion of this study dealing with the external evidence, we gave extensive consideration to the statement of Irenaeus regarding Revelation's date. There we noted that the commonly received interpretation of Irenaeus is not without ambiguity. The all-important question in the matter is: Did Irenaeus mean to say that *Revelation* was seen by John in Domitian's reign? Or did he mean that *John*, who saw the Revelation, was seen in Domitian's reign? By the very nature of the case, verbal inflection alone is incapable of resolving the matter. More helpful are the contextual indicators available that suggest Irenaeus meant the latter of the two options.

Even if this re-interpretive approach to Irenaeus fails, however, we pointed out that Irenaeus was subject to error — even on matters he claims to have heard from first-hand sources (such as when he asserted that Jesus lived to be almost fifty years old). It is time for biblical scholars and Church historians to consider afresh Irenaeus's statement regarding Revelation. Especially is this the case since so much weight is granted to his witness, despite its ambiguity.

Additional inquiry into the other major late date witnesses from tradition turned up some rather surprising facts: The alleged evidence from both Clement of Alexandria and Origen – the two most important witnesses after Irenaeus — actually requires a reading of the name "Domitian" into their texts at crucial points. Otherwise,

their statements would be wholly irrelevant to the question of Revelation's date. Indeed, we showed that there is the strong probability that they really intended to speak of Nero as the one who banished John to Patmos. We hope that our research at least demonstrated the need for a more hesitant employment of such witnesses. Furthermore, as our research developed we noted that there were ample indications from tradition beyond Irenaeus, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria suggesting that John's banishment to Patmos and his writing of Revelation were under Nero. We surveyed The Shepherd of Hermas, Papias, the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, Epiphanies, the Syrian tradition, and Arethas. Some of these are not conclusive, to be sure, but they are at least as suggestive and as significant as are Origen and Clement of Alexandria, who are so widely touted by late date advocacy. Other references were as confident regarding Revelation's composition under Nero as they were explicit of it. And such references demand that we not view Irenaeus's witness as representative of all early tradition.

The Internal Witness

On the whole, however, our position is that the matter requires a consideration of the internal indicators for an assured resolution to the matter. As we entered into a consideration of the self-witness or internal evidence, we came upon a wealth of evidences supportive of the later era of Nero's reign as that era of John and his original audience. These internal indicators provide chronological, cultural, historical, and psychological data, all converging on the tumultuous mid-A.D. 60s. The multiple statements as to the imminent expectation of radical upheaval in Revelation are more understandable in the 60s than in the 90s. These expectations were of the persecution of the Church, the destruction of the Temple and Israel, and of upheaval at Rome – chaos unparalleled in the events of the A.D. 90s.

We set forth a variety of rather precise chronological indicators derived from the kings list in Revelation 17, all pointing to Nero as the reigning emperor. Revelation's composition during Nero's reign was confirmed in a number of harmonious evidences: the existence of the Temple at Jerusalem, textual clues identifying Nero as the Beast, the primitive nature of Christianity, and the looming of the Jewish War. All of these dove-tailed nicely, providing a solid framework for a Neronic date for Revelation. Neither were these historical

indicators weakened in the least by the internal evidences arrayed by late date advocates.

My confident conviction is that a solid case for a Neronic date for Revelation can be set forth from the available evidences, both internal and external. In fact, I would lean toward a date after the outbreak of the Neronic persecution in late A.D. 64 and before the declaration of the Jewish War in early A.D. 67. A date in either A.D. 65 or early A.D. 66 would seem most suitable. My hope is that the debate will be renewed with vigor and care, for the matter is more than a merely academic or intellectual exercise; it has ramifications in the area of practical Christianity.

A Reminder of the Practical Import of the Question

The resolution of the question of the dating of Revelation has far-reaching practical implications for the average Christian. As noted in our opening comments, fascination with Revelation is an extremely widespread phenomenon in American Christianity. Almost certainly this fascination will continue. The importance of Revelation for eschatological inquiry lends it an especially influential role in the development and implementation of a Christian worldview. Hence, it is of grave ethical and cultural significance in that it impacts on the Christian's view of history.

On the one hand, if Christianity's eschatological expectation is that of an imminently portending and dismally precipitous decline and extinction of Christian influence in our day, as much of current Christian literature suggests, then our Christian endeavor will be powerfully bent in one direction. And it must necessarily be turned *away from* the implementation of long-term Christian cultural progress and dominion. If Revelation's judgments are yet to occur and lie in our future, then we must expect and prepare for the worst.

On the other hand, if the expectation held by the Christian community is of a sure hope for progress and victory, then the focus of Christian enterprise will be of a constructive and future-oriented nature. Our cultural endeavor will not be in despite of our eschatology, but in light of it. In this regard, if Revelation's judgments lie in the past and punctuate the close of the old order in preparation for a divinely wrought *novus ordo seclorum* in which God will be engaged in "reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19) and "drawing all

men" to Christ ('John 12:31), then the Church can confidently seek to bring "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

We also noted in the beginning of our inquiry that a serious confusion as to the nature and message of Revelation is partly responsible for the cultural defeatism and retreatist pietism so influential in twentieth century Christianity. There we observed that one reason for confusion as to the Church's future is due to a radical misunderstanding of the date of the writing of Revelation. If Revelation is inadvertently dated *after* the events it prophesies as future, the way is opened to a radical misconstruing of its message. Indeed, not only has the message been misread in such circumstances, but it has been wholly inverted, placing in our future what really lies in our past. Hence, the significance of the date of Revelation.

APPENDIX

A RESPONSE TO HOUSE AND ICE

After the manuscript for this book had been sent to the typesetter, an interesting critical analysis of the early date view of Revelation came to my attention. This analysis is contained in a book by Dallas Seminary professor H. Wayne House and Pastor Thomas D. Ice, entitled *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* In this work, the authors offer a neo-dispensationalist analysis and refutation of those Christians who hold to the doctrinal complex of Calvinistic soteriology, presuppositional apologetics, theonomic ethics, postmillennial eschatology, and covenantal commitment. [1] As a theological system, this doctrinal complex has come to be associated with the broader theological movement known as "Dominion Theology"; as a theological framework for Christian social theory, it is known as Christian Reconstruction.

Chapter 12 of House and Ice's work is entitled "'Rightly Dividing' the Book of Revelation," and it is directly relevant to the present work. In Chapter 12, the authors critique the *preterist* approach to the book of Revelation, which understands most of Revelation's prophecies as being fulfilled with the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This view has been revived recently by some Reconstructionists, and is becoming increasingly popular among others, even among many outside of Reconstructionism. In the first half of Chapter 12, the authors critique David Chilton's *Days of Vengeance,* focusing much of their attention on his brief notes regarding Revelation's date.

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1. H. Wayne House and Thomas D. Ice, Dominion *Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1988), p, 17. Probably we should speak of a capital "R Rcconstructionism when we mean that system which employs these five points. Small "r" reconstructionism might be used to refer to those who desire a Christian reconstructed society, whether or not they hold to these five points (perhaps Francis Schaefer is a good example of a small "r" reconstructionist).

Although virtually every point made by House and Ice regarding Revelation's date already has been dealt with in the main body of this work, a direct response to them may be of interest to the reader. Having now come upon their book, Dr. Greg Bahnsen and I are preparing a full, book-length response to it. However, here in just a few pages, I will deal with the comments they make in their Chapter 12, particularly as they affect the date of Revelation, but also with reference to a few related matters.

Preparatory Observations

One particularly frustrating aspect of the recent debate regarding Reconstructionist views is the tendency of the opponents of Reconstructionism to confuse issues. House and Ice's opening statement in Chapter 12 illustrates this problem: "The validity of the Christian Reconstruction agenda is vitally dependent upon the last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation." By this they mean Revelation as interpreted from "the preterist, postmillennial viewpoint."2 This simply is not true, and for a number of reasons.

Preterism and *Reconstructionism*

First, in point of fact, it has only been in recent years of Reconstructionist thought that serious and sustained attention has been focused on the Book of Revelation. Chilton's commentary itself was not published until 1987, with its forerunner, *Paradise Restored*, preceding it by only two years. Earlier, in its "Symposium on the Millennium," *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction* did not even make reference to preterism![3] If "the validity of the Christian Reconstruction agenda" were "vitally dependent" upon the preterist approach to Revelation, this doctrine would have been dealt with much earlier in the development of the recent resurgence of Reconstructionist thought.

That Reconstructionists began to devote considerable time, money, and effort to the book of Revelation well over a decade after the preliminary outline of their position was in completed form indicates that their perspective is not governed by preterism. But House and Ice's perspective is surely governed by futurism, so they have targeted this aspect of Reconstructionism as being primary to the Reconstruc-

2. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 249.

3. Gary North, cd., *The* Journal *of* Christian *Reconstruction* III:2 (Winter, 1976-1977), *passim.*

tionist system. They perhaps mean "primary to dispensationalism's critique" of the Reconstructionist system.

Second, it is true that R. J. Rushdoony gave an introductory survey of Revelation in his 1970 work entitled, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation.* But it needs to be noted that Rushdoony's view is decidedly non-preterist. In his first footnote in the Revelation study, he even discounts the nearness of the events of Revelation in John's day, a position which is essential to the preteristic approach. He does so by favorably quoting premillennialist (non-dispensationalist) Henry Alford.[4] Properly speaking, Rushdoony's interpretive approach to Revelation is the idealist view. Is Rushdoony not a "Reconstructionist" ?[5] Has he no "Reconstructionist agenda" ?[6] House and Ice may regard the "Tyler" branch of the Reconstructionist movement as the more representative branch, as distinguished from Rushdoony's "Vallecito" branch, but surely to ignore *Thy Kingdom Come* and its non-preterist perspective on the book of Revelation is misleading.

Third, that which Reconstructionism actually depends upon in eschatology is not a specifically preteristic approach to the book of Revelation or Matthew 24. Rather it is a *victorious eschatology* in general *(i.e.,* postmillennialism), as House and Ice well know.[7] And optimistic eschatology is found throughout Scripture, irrespective of Revelation. Actually, dispensationalists are the ones who tend to begin with the last book of the Bible in the development of their eschatology. Reconstructionists in particular and postmillennialists in general leave Revelation as chronologically the last (or perhaps, nearly the last) book of the Bible, interpreting it on the basis of a biblico-theological understanding of Scripture from Genesis through the New Testament.[8]

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4. Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come: Studies in Daniel and Revelation* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), p. 86 n. 1.

5. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology,* p. 45.

6. House and Ice mention him first as one of the three leaders of Reconstructionist thought (*Dominion Theology,* p. 17).

7. *Ibid.,* p. 17. They specifically note that a 1987 meeting of 100 Reconstructionists "produced a list of ten points of belief 'which all saw as the fundamentals of the Christian Reconstruction Movement.' Point seven insisted *on* a postmillennial view of the kingdom of God" (p. 301). Preterism is an interpretive approach to prophecy; eschatology is a locus of systematic. The two are not interchangeable.

8. "To understand Reconstructionist views of the end, we must go back to the beginning" (Ibid., p. 47).

Clearing Up a Misconception

It maybe that the following statement by House and Ice is poorly phrased, but as it stands, it definitely leaves an erroneous impression that needs correction:

> The preterist, postmillennial viewpoint of the Christian Reconstruction movement, as expounded by David Chilton in *The Days of Vengeance*, stands or falls on whether or not the final book of the Bible was written before A.D. 70. Fellow postmillennialist and pre-A.D. 70 preterist Kenneth L. Gentry notes this major weakness when he says, "if it could be demonstrated that Revelation were written 25 years after the Fall of Jerusalem, Chilton's entire labor would go up in smoke. "[9]

When they state that the particular pretenstic approach of Chilton (with which I agree) stands or falls on the early date of Revelation, I concur. But when they add that I note "this major weakness," the impression that clearly remains is that I am suggesting that the major weakness of *this preterist view of Revelation is* that it has to depend on an early date – as if I deemed the evidence for an early date as being weak![10] Such was not the intention of my statement at all. I was reviewing Chilton's book, and I merely pointed out that I believe that a major weakness of his book – not the preterist view as such – is that it does not deal in more depth with the dating question. However, I did note that Chilton's book is subtitled: "An *Exposition* of the Book of Revelation." [11] It is an expository, not a critical, commentary. The "major weakness" statement was regarding what Chilton left out of his book (a thorough inquiry into the question of Revelation's date), not preteristic postmillennialism or early date advocacy.

The Problem of Partial Citation

In defense of Chilton, it should be noted that an imprecise statement by House and Ice leaves the impression that Chilton has created *de novo* a faulty argument for the early date of Revelation. Their statement reads:

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9. *Ibid.*, p. *249*, citing Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., "The Days of Vengeance: A Review Article," *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (June 1987): 11.

10. I clearly state my convictions regarding the early date in the article they cite: "Days of Vengeance," p. 11.

11. *Ibid., p.* 11.

> What are the "superficially argued" points Chilton attempts to make for his position? . . . First, "St. John's intimate acquaintance with the minute details of Temple worship suggests that the Book of Revelation and the Fourth Gospel must have been written before the Temple services had actually ceased." This argument proves nothing as to whether or not the temple was standing at the time of writing. . . .[12]

Anyone reading their statement, which includes a quotation from Chilton, would surmise that Chilton is guilty of creating strained evidence without historical precedent or warrant. However, Chilton's point was preceded by a lengthy supporting quotation from the highly respected nineteenth-century Jewish-Christian scholar, Alfred Edersheim. In fact, more than half of the statement quoted by House and Ice as Chilton's was actually a quotation from Edersheim.[13] Since House and Ice are prone to do some name-dropping in support of their arguments,[14] they should allow Chilton the privilege by accurately representing his argument and its sources.

But now to my major concern.

The Matter of Revelation's Date

"The" Voice of Tradition?

As is common among late date advocates, House and Ice speak as if there were a unified Church tradition regarding the date of Revelation: "Chilton questions the voice of church tradition concerning the date of Revelation, since it strongly negates his early date viewpoint."[15] The book by House and Ice is aimed at a general audience; the effect on the general audience doubtless will be: "Ancient Christianity harmoniously held that Revelation was written later than A.D. 70." Let us cite Chilton's actual statement and notice the different impression left:

> (St Irenaeus, incidentally, is the *only* source for this late dating of Revelation; all other "sources" are simply quoting from him. It is thus rather disingenuous for commentators to claim, as Swete does, that

12. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. *250*.

13. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 3, and Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as They Were at the Time of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 141.

14. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, pp. 252ff.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

> "Early Christian tradition is almost unanimous in assigning the Apocalypse to the last years of Domitian.") Certainly, there are other early writers whose statements indicate that St. John wrote the Revelation much earlier, under Nero's persecution. [16]

Chilton was careful to note that not all ancient sources supported a late date for Revelation. [17] Thus, he is not set against "*the* voice of church tradition." In fact, he specifically mentions "there are other early writers whose statements indicate" that Revelation was written under Nero.

I have noted in great detail in the text of this book that there are a number of significant early date voices that may be heard from the stream of ancient tradition. Among them I could list Clement of Alexandria (despite House and Ice[18] – and others), the Muratorian Canon, Tertullian, Epiphanies, the Syriac versions of Revelation, and Arethas, and probably Papias and The Shepherd of Hermas.[19]

There simply is no "voice [singular] of church tradition concerning the date of Revelation." It is time for late date advocates to admit this. Neither is there an "overwhelming voice of the early church" in this regard.[20] Nor may it be stated that Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorious, and Eusebius "had no witnesses to the contrary."[21] Nor should it be said that "if there were some validity to the early date, some trace of this competing tradition should have surfaced. However, it has not!"[22] Nor may we believe that there is "clear and historically accepted witness of the early church to a Domitian date."[23] To quote House and Ice against themselves: their critique of the early Church tradition seems to be "speculative"[24] and a "debater's technique."[25]

After carefully reading House and Ice, I seriously suspect that neither of them has read the original references in context in Clement

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16. Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, pp. 3-4.
17. And his footnote pointed the interested reader to exhaustive research in works by Moses Stuart and James M. Macdonald.
18. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 253.
19. See chapter 6 above.
20. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 253.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 253.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

of Alexandria and Origen, which they put forth as two of four non-Irenaean "witnesses" for a late date.[26] If they had checked the original sources, they would surely have been less confident in asserting these fathers are witnesses to the late date, for *neither Clement nor Origen mentions Domitian at all!*[27] Apparently for historical evidence, they adopt the common jargon: "It goes without saying"! Certainly neither Clement nor Origen said anything about John being banished by *Domitian.*

I hope the careful reader of their book will notice that House and Ice even admit that such astute historian-exegetes as F. J. A. Hort and Philip Schaff hold the early date, despite Irenaeus's alleged evidence.[28] There are a host of others who do, as well.[29]

Irenaeus

As I continue on in their critique, it becomes obvious that they are confident in their employment of Irenaeus against early date advocacy. Unfortunately, they do not appear to be as prepared to deal with his evidence as is requisite for their task. This inadequacy becomes all too obvious from the following evidences.

First, after citing Irenaeus's passage from *Against Heresies,* they employ a "debater's technique" (to borrow their own phrase again) by attempting to promote their point as "clear." They write: "How does Chilton deal with such a clear statement?"[30] As I have noted previously, Irenaeus's translators have commented on the difficulty of translating and interpreting him.[31] In light of such a problem as mentioned by several noted historians and linguists, how could Irenaeus's statement be deemed "clear"?

Second, after citing a particular *English translation* of Irenaeus, they comment: "Chilton questions whether [Irenaeus's] 'that was seen' refers to 'the apocalyptic vision' or to John himself. Since the impersonal pronoun 'that' is used we can assume that it refers to

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26. Ibid., p. *253.*

27. See pp. 68ff., *supra.*

28. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology,* p. *252.*

29. The reader should note my extensive list of early date advocates *given* above on pages *30-38.*

30. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology,* p. 251.

31. See pp. 47ff.

John's 'apocalyptic vision.'"" This is a serious blunder. It is obvious that they are not even aware that in the original Greek of *Against* Heresies, there is no "impersonal pronoun 'that'" ![33] The "that" which forms the basis of their argument is an English translator's interpolation! To argue as they have is equivalent to stating that an italicized word in the Bible indicates God emphasized the point, when actually it is the translator's cue to the reader that the English has been supplied despite the lack of any term in the original language. This is a debater's technique – one which loses points when the debater's opponent has read the primary source's citation in its original language.

Third, they write: "since it is called 'the apocalyptic vision,' which is something John saw, then 'was seen' refers to what John saw — 'the apocalyptic vision' — rather than someone having seen John."3[4] Again, they do not seem to have done their homework adequately. In the first place, the original Greek does not have the word "vision" (which they feel suggests the verb of seeing). The word in the original is ἀποκάλυψις ("revelation"). "Apocalyptic *vision" is* an amplified translation by the English translator! In the second place, as I have shown, the context also makes reference to *John* having been seen alive, even using the same Greek word for "saw."[35] In fact, this seems to be Irenaeus's main point!

Fourth, though properly citing Hort as an early date advocate who allows Irenaeus's statement to refer to the book of Revelation and not to its author, House and Ice leave no indication that Hort did so *with reservations*. Hort found the grammatical structure of Irenaeus's sentence difficult to account for on the common translation, as I have noted.[36] The readers of House and Ice's book would not be aware of Hort's reservation, thus their argument becomes an effective "debater's technique" by invoking Hort's name.

Finally, having dealt with Chilton's brief objection to Irenaeus, they write: "Chilton's approach is nothing more than a debater's technique. When you do not have strong reasons against something

32. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 251.
33. See above, pp. 46-59, for the Greek text and comments *on* it.
34. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. *252.*
35. *See* above, pp. 52-54.
36. See above, p. 50.

then you try to cast doubt upon the reliability of the source. "37 Not only does this well characterize what House and Ice do to Chilton, but again the reader is left with the false impression that Chilton is the only person to have ever questioned the interpretation of Irenaeus. I have shown that such is simply not the case.[38]

The authors then attempt to support the reliability of Irenaeus against Chilton. They note that Irenaeus was "one of the most reliable of all the early church fathers."39 Their proof of this assertion (whether true or not) is almost incredible. They quote from pop-theologian Hal Lindsey, as if he were a noteworthy scholar of Church history!

But what if their argumentative methodology were consistently applied? Could their statement that Irenaeus is "one of the most reliable" fathers be used to defend Irenaeus's statement that Jesus lived to be almost fifty years old?[40] After all, Hal Lindsey does say that Irenaeus is "careful and accurate with facts"!

Don-titian's Persecution

In contradiction to Chilton's references to the Neronic Persecution backdrop for Revelation, House and Ice suggest that "a stronger case can be made for more severe persecution under Domitian than Chilton admits" and "there is no hard evidence of persecution under Nero in Asia during any part of his reign."[41]

As I have already shown,42 there is widespread and vigorous debate as to whether or not Domitian persecuted Christians *at all!* And as far as "hard evidence" goes there is *absolutely no* contemporary or secular evidence for a Domitianic persecution, whereas Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius supply us with such for a Neronic persecution.

External Evidence?

In a strange misnomer, House and Ice label the evidence drawn

37. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 252.
38. *See* above, pp. 47ff.
39. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 253.
40. *See* above, pp. 63-64.
41. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 255.
42. *See* above, chapter 17.

from the Seven Letters and from Revelation's allusions to emperor worship as "external evidence"![43] New Testament scholars consider *external* evidence to be drawn from tradition, not from within the pages of the work in question.[44] Their error points out a degree of carelessness in their method.

In addition, all the "external" arguments they present for a late date in that section have been answered in great detail above. The arguments from the existence of the church at Smyrna,[45] the prevalence of emperor worship,[46] the nature of the Neronic persecution,[47] the earthquake in Laodicea,[48] and spiritual decline in the Seven Churches[49] simply do not demand a Domitianic date. Furthermore, I stand in wonder at the blatant schizophrenia of their argument! House and Ice dogmatically argue that Revelation is to be interpreted from a *futurist* viewpoint, that is, they aver that its prophecy in Revelation 4:1-22:5 regards distantly future events .50 But then they "prove" a late date by pointing to emperor worship in the text of Revelation and apply it to Domitian. The references to emperor worship, which are used by late date advocates, are found in Revelation 13 primarily! Which is it: Are those references reflecting a Domitianic emperor worship (as used in the late date argument)? Or are they referring to the centuries distant Great Tribulation (as used in the futurist approach to Revelation)?

Prophecy and Jerusalem

Statements as fallacious as they are bold are made by House and Ice regarding the destruction of Jerusalem in prophecy. In response to Chilton's comment that "Revelation is primarily a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Remans," House and Ice ask:[51]

If this were such a clear "fact," then why did *none* of the early church

43. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 256.

44. E.g., Guthrie, New *Testament Introduction,* p. 956; Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament,* pp. 466-467; Stonehouse, Origins, p. 1.

45. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 256. See above, pp. 322-326.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 256. See above, chapter 16.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 257. See above, chapter 17.

48. *Ibid., See* above, pp. 19-322.

49. *Ibid., See* above, pp. 326-329.

50. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, pp. 260ff, 278.

51. Though writing under the heading of "Internal Evidence," here they slip into the external evidence.

> writings reflect Chilton's views in their interpretation of Revelation? If the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem fulfilled so much of biblical prophecy, then why is this *not* reflected in the views of the early church? Why is it that *all* of the early fathers, when referring to Revelation and Matthew 24, see these as future events?[52]

And since they spend a good deal of space on the influence of Daniel 9:25ff on Matthew 24:15, surely they would include the handling of Daniel 9 in this statement.[53] After all, they attempt to distinguish Luke 21:20-24 from Matthew 24:15 on this very basis: "In contrast, the Matthew 24:15 passage has a context of its own which differs from the Luke account. Matthew says, 'when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet (not Luke), standing in the holy place . . .' Comparison of the description in Matthew and Daniel with the passage in Luke yields differences, which *prove* that they are *two separate events*."[54] They even state: "One major reason Matthew 24 could not have been fulfilled in A.D. 70 is that 'the abomination of desolation' (24:15) was not accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem."[55] Thus, on their own analysis Daniel 9 should be no more preteristic than Matthew 24 and should be no more heard of being interpreted preteristically in early Christianity than it is.

It is here I begin to suspect that they have done *very little* reading in patristics, though they write with confidence as if they had. This is a part of the problem that frustrates the early date advocate: among popular writers urging the late date, there is frequent bold assertion without adequate knowledge. However, let us note a few samples that falsify such a claim.

As I have noted, there are references to the destruction of Jerusalem in the context of Revelation studies in the ancient Church. I pointed out that in his day, Andreas of Cappadocia had to respond to comments made earlier by several Christian writers who applied various of the prophecies of Revelation to the destruction of Jerusalem.[56] Also Arethas specifically interprets various passages in Revelation in terms of the destruction of Jerusalem.[57]

52. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology*, p. 258 (emphasis mine).
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 287-290.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 290 (emphasis mine).
55. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
56. See above, pp. 106-107.
57. See above, pp. 107-108.

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapters 5-8, Eusebius details the woes that befell Jerusalem in A.D. 70, mostly by reference to Josephus. In Chapter 7 he writes that "it is fitting to add to these accounts [i.e., Josephus's] the true prediction of our Saviour in which he foretold these very events."[58] He then cites Matthew 24:19-21 as his leading reference and later cites Luke 21:20, 23, 24! He even states: "If any one compares the words of our Saviour with the other accounts of the historian [Josephus] concerning the whole war, how can one fail to wonder, and to admit that the foreknowledge and the prophecy of our Saviour were truly divine and marvelously strange."[59]

Origen, in his commentary on Matthew, spoke of Israel's divorce by God and made reference to Luke 21 (the parallel of Matthew 24): "And a sign that she [Israel] has received the bill of divorcement is this, that Jerusalem was destroyed along with what they called the sanctuary of the things in it which were believed to be holy, and with the altar of burnt offerings, and all the worship associated with it . . . . And thousands of things commanded are a sign of the bill of divorcement. . . . Wherefore, when He was avenged, Jerusalem was compassed with armies, and its desolation was near. "[60] Also:

> But let this Jew of Celsus, who does not believe that He fore knew all that happened to Him, consider how, while Jerusalem was still standing and the whole Jewish worship celebrated in it, Jesus foretold what would befall it from the hand of the Remans. For they will not maintain that the acquaintances and pupils of Jesus Himself handed down His teaching contained in the Gospels without committing it to writing, and left His disciples without the memoirs ofJesus contained in their works. Now in these it is recorded, that "when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed about with armies, then shall ye know that the desolation thereof is nigh." But at that time there were no armies around Jerusalem, encompassing and enclosing and besieging it; for the siege began in the reign of Nero, and lasted till the government of Vespasian, whose son Titus destroyed Jerusalem, on account, as Josephus says, ofJames the Just, the brother ofJesus who was called Christ, but in reality, as the truth makes clear, on account of Jesus

58. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, *3:7:1-2.*
59. *Ibid.*, 3:7:7.
60. Origen, *Matthew, 19.* The reference to Jerusalem encompassed by armies is a clear allusion to Luke 21:20, which is a parallel passage to Matt. 24:15, despite House and Ice.

Christ the Son of God.[61]

Another ancient document that makes reference to the destruction of the temple based on Matthew 24:2-34 is the *Clementine Homilies*.[62] There we read:

> But our Master did not prophesy after this fashion; but, as I have already said, being a prophet by an inborn and every-flowing Spirit, and knowing all things at all times, He confidently set forth, plainly as I said before, sufferings, places, appointed times, manners, limits. Accordingly, therefore, prophesying concerning the temple, He said: "See ye these buildings? Verily I say to you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another which shall not be taken away [Matt. 24:3]; and this generation shall not pass until the destruction begin [Matt. 24:34]. . . ." And in like manner He spoke in plain words the things that were straightway to happen, which we can now see with our eyes, in order that the accomplishment might be among those to whom the word was spoken.[63]

In Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies, we* read his discussion of the Daniel 9:24-27 passage:

> And thus Christ became King of the Jews, reigning in Jerusalem in the fulfillment of the seven weeks. And in the sixty and two weeks the whole of Judaea was quiet, and without wars. And Christ our Lord, "the Holy of Holies," having come and fulfilled the vision and the prophecy, was anointed in His flesh by the Holy Spirit of His Father. In those "sixty and two weeks," as the prophet said, and "in the one week," was He Lord. The half of the week Nero held sway, and in the holy city Jerusalem placed the abomination; and in the half of the week he was taken away, and Otho, and Galba, and Vitellius. And Vespasian rose to the supreme power, and destroyed Jerusalem, and desolated the holy place.

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61. Origen, *Against Celsus, 2:13 (See* Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, 4437).* Origen further discusses the destruction of Jerusalem as a final act removing the Jews forever from their former favor (422; See Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, 4506).*

62. Though not written by a noted Church father, it is a late second century work that touches on the matter before us. House and Ice boldly state that preterism is found in "none of the early church writings" (p. 258). Yet, here is a work that shows early consideration of the matter, apparently picking up on views current in that day.

63. *Clementine Homilies*, 3:15. See Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, 8:241.*

As a matter of fact, *several* of the early fathers held a distinctly preteristic interpretation of Daniel 9![64]

In Cyprian we have clear reference to Matthew 24 as referring to Jerusalem's A.D. 70 fall.[65] In the entirety of Treatise 12 he is dealing with testimonies against the Jews, including Christ's prophecies.

Surely it may not be stated, as do House and Ice: "Why is it that all of the early fathers, when referring to Revelation and Matthew 24, see these as future events?"[66]

Nero and Revelation

House and Ice write: "If Chilton could show that Nero is the ruler spoken of in Revelation, then he would have a major victory for his view. But he cannot. "[67] As I have shown in great detail many lines of evidence converge upon Nero[68]: (1) His place as the sixth among the Roman emperors, (2) his being followed by a seventh, brief reigning emperor (Galba), (3) his name's numerical value of 666, (4) his living while the temple still stood, (5) the prominence of his persecution in first century Christianity, and more. There is an old adage: If the shoe fits, wear it. Nero's footprints are all over Revelation.

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64. For a discussion of early interpretive approaches to Daniel 9, see Louis E. Knowles, "The Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers," *Westminster Theological Journal* 7:2 (May, 1945), *137-138.* Actual references include: *The Epistle of Barnabas* 16:6; Tertullian, *Against the Jews 8* (despite being a Montanist and therefore premillennial!); Origen, *Matthew 24:15;* Julius Africanus, *Chronography* (relevant portions preserved in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 10:10 and *Demonstrations of the Gospel 8);* Eusebius (*Demonstrations 8);* and Augustine in his 199th epistle.

65. Cyprian, *Treatises, 12:1:6,* 15. See especially Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers, 5:507-511.*

66. House and Ice, *Dominion Theology,* p. 258 (emphasis mine). In the final analysis, however, one must wonder how their argument carries weight in light of the Plymouth Brethren roots of dispensationalism. After all, it is the chief proponent of dispensationalism, Charles C. Ryrie, who defends dispensationalism from "the charge of recency" by labeling such a charge a "straw man" and arguing from history as a "fallacy." In addition he writes: "The fact that something was taught in the first century does not make it right (unless taught in the canonical Scriptures), and the fact that something was not taught until the nineteenth century does not make it wrong . . ." (*Dispensationalism Today* [Chicago: Moody, 1965], p. 66).

67. *Ibid.,* p. 2.59.

68. See above, chapters 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, and 18.

Conclusion

Space fails our responding to other aspects of the argument by House and Ice. Perhaps I will develop them at more length in the book-length response to their *Dominion Theology*. Yet I believe that if anyone were to consider the few problems associated with their Chapter 12, which I have noted above, he would quickly see that *as presented,*[69] the argument by House and Ice is fraught with misconception and error. Though they disparage employing the "debater's technique" of casting "doubt upon the reliability of the source," I must confess that as far as the "Reconstruction debate" goes, I seriously question the reliability of House and Ice.

69. House and Ice note that theirs is but the first of several book-length responses to Reconstructionism in the works (Dominion *Theology*, p. 9). Perhaps they were a little too hasty in attempting to beat the others to the punch. It may be that the other responses will be a little more careful in their presentations and will require analysis from a different perspective.

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